

## The Hornsey Vampires

(Season two of London's Night Stalkers)

### Chapter 22 – Mordaunt's World

**“The rising moon could be seen through the trees behind them. Despite being a sickly yellow colour, it was their moon, the moon everyone knew so well. Nearly full, though it wasn't giving them much light to see by.”**

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Daniel leant over the fence and patted the pigs he'd just bought. Three to be fattened up for meat, he was going to slowly but surely move away from selling low priced electronics on Ebay. Gwen had made a real success out of her small holding and he was going to do the same. And there was Jack to consider now. The boy would never be an expert when it came to online selling, but he was a natural at looking after livestock. He was rubbing the ears of a new arrival, as though it was a cat.

“Mum always tells me they're not pets.” Said Jack.

“They're not, they're here to earn us some money.” Said Daniel. “A little affection does no harm though.”

“But..... Won't you be sad when they go ?”

“Probably Jack, but perhaps that's a good thing.”

The trick with pigs was to sell them for a profit before they either ate you out of house and home, or you became too attached to them. Daniel wouldn't really feel any sorrow when their pigs went to slaughter, he'd just pretend he did.

“Oh, look at the state of you.” Said Daniel. “We'd best get you indoor and cleaned up. You're not going anywhere near my parcels like that. Imagine someone getting pig muck in with their clock radio.”

“That would be funny.”

As Jack ran into the house, Daniel took a moment to look at the small holding near Pitmedden that he thought of as home. Gwen was settled now, the boy was settled. Daniel had everything he'd always wanted, yet there was a feeling. He looked at the approaching clouds and knew a storm was on the way. He also knew something else was going to come over the horizon to upset his life. Daniel wasn't sure what it would be or when it would arrive.

“It's on the way though, I can almost taste it.” He muttered. “That's one of the problems with living an unnaturally long life. It gives the world more opportunities to throw crap your way.”

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Laura arrived through the doorway coughing. Not just her, Liz was coughing and wheezing too. The air tasted strange, almost old and tired. There definitely wasn't enough oxygen, though there was no way of telling if that might be dangerous. Vampires had ways of coping with a lack of oxygen, but Liz wasn't a vampire.

“It feels like I've got soot at the back of my throat.” Said Liz. “My heart is beating so fast, pounding against my chest.”

“Nice deep breaths and keep still until you feel your heart slow down.”

With luck Liz's changed body would adapt, if not..... Laura couldn't see a way out. Liz had to adjust to the air wherever they were, or she'd die.

“Where are we ?” Asked Liz.

“Don't talk until you're breathing better. Lots of deep breaths Liz.”

The door they'd come through wasn't there, though there was a stone wall behind them. Laura touched it and nothing happened. She'd assumed the same door they'd used to get there would take them home. Laura was realising the dangers that come with quick assumptions.

"I'm feeling a little better."

"No hurry Liz, I need you fighting fit."

"Me ! I think you brought the wrong girl."

The wall behind them had once been part of a large building, they were surrounded by its ruins. Through the gap where a doorway had probably stood, she could see a path leading down to a stream. It was daylight, though only just. Her eyes were finding it hard to see details and the sky was crimson with yellow clouds.

"This definitely isn't anywhere near Whitby." She said.

"I'm much better, just don't ask me to run anywhere."

The sky was telling her nothing. It might have been close to night, or the reddish gloom was as good as the light ever got.

"I feel it here, though it's a long way off." She said pointing. "The Circle is that way..... Quite some distance that way I think."

"I'm ready to move." Said Liz.

Laura took it slowly along the path. It descended slowly, ending at a ruined stone bridge that had once crossed the stream. Everything was so old, so ruined. It was as though whatever might have happened there, had occurred a long time ago.

"Oh my God, look Laura..... Look !" Said Liz.

The rising moon could be seen through the trees behind them. Despite being a sickly yellow colour, it was their moon, the moon everyone knew so well. Nearly full, though it wasn't giving them much light to see by.

"It's twice the size it should be." Said Liz.

"At least twice the size, probably closer here." Said Laura. "Horus said the Circle of Arcardis was from another reality. I think we must be there..... Everything the same, but also very different."

"Do you still feel where it is ?"

"Yes, it's where the stream is heading. It's definitely getting darker, we may need to sleep out in the open tonight."

"Tonight. Do you think we'll be here for some time ?"

"Perhaps, I'm not sure.....I know nothing about this place." Said Laura.

The moon gave a little more light once it was higher in the sky. Still a sickly yellow light that would have been of little use to a human. Laura could see well enough by it though and Liz hadn't tripped over anything. The air was still troubling Liz though, or rather the lack of it. Laura was almost carrying her when they reached the edge of the cliff. The stream became a small waterfall, which they could hear hitting the ground far below them.

"There..... Not everything is deserted ruins." Said Laura. "That is where we'll find the Circle, I feel it beckoning me now, almost daring me to come for it."

"I see it Laura, more ruins. I can't even tell what the building once was in this light."

"It was large once, whatever it might have been. Ruin it might be Liz, but someone living must have lit the lights down there, I count seven of them, maybe more."

The cliff was high and the lights were still some distance away. The cliff gave them a good vantage point, but they needed daylight to find a path to the bottom. Laura looked around and apart from the trees, there was no shelter at all.

"I don't like the look of the woods, but the night is getting colder." She said. "We'll need to shelter among the trees and take it in turns to sleep. The nights may be longer here of course, or shorter."

"We should have taken time to prepare." Said Liz.

"If we had, we'd still have been in Millicent Spooner's house a fortnight from now, still deciding what to bring and how to get back again."

"How do we get back?"

"For that at least, I do have a plan..... Come on Liz, you can sleep first while I keep watch."

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Simon hadn't wanted to meet Tasha Wallis again. Patsy had called to let her know the close protection team would be leaving at the end of the week. After the death of Bill, it was insane to connect himself with someone so involved with him and the death of Olivia. Insane or not, Simon found himself looking up at the house as he rang the doorbell.

"Simon, what a nice surprise. Patsy told me I'd probably never see you again."

The hired guards were still in the house, more people he didn't want linking his face with the late William Jarrold.

"I just wanted to make sure you're alright, and Rocky of course." He said. "If you've got a moment, can we take a walk somewhere? Just for a few minutes."

"Yes..... I'd better put some shoes on though and tell Kerry where I'm going."

"Have they been alright, the guards I mean?" He asked.

"Yes, perfect. Even Rocky took to some of them."

There was a café quite close, but he didn't really want to be seen with her. A walk around the block seemed the safest thing and the streets were fairly empty.

"I just wanted to make sure you're alright and feel safe now."

"Yes, I had a visitor, a senior man from the police." Said Tasha. "He even apologised to me about the way Olivia's disappearance had been handled at the time. He assured me that Bill's death meant the end of any threat to me. It would have been nice to see him stand trial though."

"Was your visitor from the police Harry Beck?"

"Yes, he even left me a card, in case I needed his help."

Laura had sent her the before and after pictures of Bill's death, but he didn't want to talk about that, even in a deserted street.

"You can call Patsy too..... If you ever feel threatened again."

"Thank you Simon."

An unexpected kiss on the cheek.

"I really came to make sure that after everything..... Do you feel better Tasha? Is it over?"

"Thank you for not using that dreadful word closure. To be honest I still feel a little hollow inside, I probably always will."

She leant in close and whispered.

"Thank you Simon, for a little justice for Olivia and some vengeance for me."

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Laura woke just as the sky went from dark crimson to a slightly lighter shade of red. She could see the yellow clouds again and decided that it must be whatever passed for dawn in that world. Strangely she didn't react to the creature hiding among the trees. Somewhere deep down, she knew the beast was no threat.

"So you allowed yourself to fully change?" She asked.

It had to have been something she'd allowed to happen, Liz had even undressed. Her clothes were in a neat pile, with her shoes placed on top. The creature was one of the most inhuman things Laura had ever seen, yet her friend still felt like her friend. The voice of the creature was low, the words mangled. Again though, there was no mistaking that a great deal of Liz was still there.

"I had to change..... They came. Several of them."

A little more light as the sun came up, the crimson glow becoming a circle of bilious yellow. Laura went over to what looked like three dead wolves, actually four counting the one near the cliff. Twice the size of any wolf Laura had seen.

"You should have woken me." She said.

"I knew you were tired and they weren't hard to kill. They probably came looking for a meal, but I fed on them."

Liz was holding up a hand that wasn't a hand at all. Lots of writhing tentacles attached to her wrist. As Liz spoke they moved, as though the dreadful things had a life of their own.

"These fed on them for me, I have no idea how. There wasn't much nutrition in them."

Her friend was finally making her feel uncomfortable, there was nothing human about the way she looked or behaved.

"You should change back Liz, unless you intend to stay like that while we're here?"

"No, I'll change. Just..... Look away, I'm sure you'll find it unpleasant."

Laura washed her face in the stream, but she did watch the beginning of Liz changing back to being human. There was a lot of ripped flesh, the appearance of organs never intended to see the light of day. Surprisingly little blood for such a brutal change. It didn't take long for a naked Liz to join her beside the stream.

"Not my blood, it belonged to the wolves." She said, as she turned the water red.

"What is it that you become Liz? Do you know yet?"

"Not really, it's the consequence Magda warned me about. Some sort of guardian of the dead and the underworld I think, though I'm not sure. I am lucky though, for some the change is one way and permanent."

"Will you ever change into that creature and not be able to turn back?"

"I'm not sure..... I must dress. I saw the wolves come up from below the cliff, there must be a path."

Liz looked scared and unwilling to talk about it any further. Laura didn't blame her. Being a vampire was fun most of the time and she still fitted into the world of humans. But that thing.....Being that thing forever was unthinkable. Magda had to be kept alive of course, she might know how to reverse the 'consequence.'

"Over here Laura..... Not really a path, looks like a track used by the animals."

The track was steep and difficult to follow. Laura lost her footing once and nearly fell, a rare thing for a vampire. The grasslands at the bottom of the cliff looked more lush than anything they'd seen so far. Birds too, some so large they'd dared to dive at their heads in an attempt to shoo them away.

"Are we close to the Circle?" Asked Liz.

"Yes, the building looks more of a ruin than it did from the cliff."

Laura pointed at what looked like a huge pile of broken stones and bricks. She led with Liz following a few feet behind. The Circle of Arcadis was pulling at Laura, drawing her towards the other side of the ruined building. It took over an hour to reach the ruined doorway and the tunnel leading down into the ground.

"Do you want me to handle that?" Asked Liz.

“Hey, don’t get cocky after killing four wolves. You should see some of the things Mabina and I have had to fight. It’s my turn anyway.”

The two men sat on the pile of stones near the tunnel looked like guards. No firearms, though each had a serious looking knife on their belt. There was something almost medieval about their clothing. In a way it was pleasing to see humans, even if they were shouting at them in an incomprehensible language.

“What are they saying ?” Asked Liz.

“I have no idea.”

Everything went well until Laura tried to walk past the two men. One tried to stab her, so she cut his throat with his own blade. She didn’t like feeding in front of humans, but Liz no longer seemed to be all that human. Laura grabbed the second man around the neck, pushing him down so she could feed. There was something wrong about him, she felt it.

“Ewww.” She said, as she snapped his neck.

“What’s wrong, not your type ?”

“Not sure why, he just didn’t feel right. We’ll take their blades..... Search that one, they might have something useful.”

Laura’s man had a few coins in his pickets, none of them anything she’d seen before. Liz was showing her a matchbook for somewhere called the Silver Pony, written in English.

“Curiouser and curiouser.” Said Liz.

“Come on Liz, down the rabbit hole.”

There were oil lamps hung up at intervals along the wall of the tunnel. Laura took one and carried it with her, just in case their travels led to somewhere dark.

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Liz had called him a few times from Whitby and she was due back quite soon, but Brendan Roche was feeling bored. It was his fault he hadn’t been allowed to travel with them, Sam’s way of punishing for yelling during the meeting and storming out of the room. When he was bored he tended to eat too much, drink too much and fall asleep.

“Stop moping about..... And she won’t appreciate you getting fat.”

The cook had told him, and given lots of other unasked for advice. She had given him a plate full of ham rolls though. The booze came from his room and as to where to go for an early evening feast ? Brendan chose the small summerhouse in a corner of what Liz referred to as the rose garden, even though most of the plants weren’t roses. No one else used the summerhouse, they’d even had sex there while Laura and Mabina were recovering one of the artefacts.

“Stop being an idiot, she’ll probably be back tomorrow.” He muttered to himself.

Love knows no logic though and he was well and truly smitten. He ate the rolls and drank the vodka straight out of the bottle. It was quite pleasant inside the summerhouse and the chair was quite comfortable. When the vodka bottle was about a quarter empty, he fell asleep.

“.....any other lies or attempted murders you need to tell me about ?”

The sound of Magda shouting woke him from a dream about drowning, he was having those quite a lot recently. Brendan got out of the chair and walked to the open door of the summerhouse.

“Some respect please, I am the leader of our order.” Yelled Sam. “I tell you what I think you need to know. Besides, you’re so besotted with that damn woman.”

Sam and Magda standing in the dark, less than ten feet away from him. He could just about see their outlines against the lights from the house. They had no chance of seeing him.

"You think you're so clever Sam Isaacs, arranging for two assassins to kill Brendan and Liz. No one you really knew of course, all arranged through an agent you trusted. Well those assassins are dead and they had families, they had wives. Worst of all for you they had brothers. The rumours are everywhere since the agent you used was found dead. The brothers are looking for you Sam, and this time you can't simply pay them off."

"Nonsense, I never killed them..... I'll explain that to them and offer a little compensation."

"Explain it to them Sam !" Yelled Magda. "Then explain it to me.... I wanted to be in that car with Liz. I would have been if that idiot Brendan hadn't talked Liz into..... Never mind. Was I part of your plan, had I become expendable too ?"

Brendan had heard enough, he began to walk towards them. Sam and Magda were busy yelling at each other and he was approaching from out of a dark area of the rose garden. The ground was soft, their voices were loud. They never heard or saw him, even when he was quite close.

"No, no Magda, please believe me." Shouted Sam. "I would never hurt you. I'd still like to arrange an accident for Liz, but not you, never you. I see you as my natural successor as head of our order."

"I just wish I could believe you, but after....."

Brendan grabbed Sam by the throat, spinning him around to hold the art dealer against his chest. Sam could still splutter a little, but he couldn't cry for help. To his surprise Magda wasn't screaming for the guards.

"Did he really do that Magda ? Did he try to kill Liz ?" He asked.

A nodding head in the dark, close enough for him to smell the perfume Magda always used.

"He did, I swear it. I still think he wanted me to die too."

Sam was trying to say something, but Brendan wasn't in the mood to listen. Strangling someone with one hand isn't easy. Brendan squeezed Sam's throat and kept on squeezing until he stopped struggling. All the time Magda just stood there, never moving, never trying to stop him, never shouting for help. Even after Sam was quite dead, Brendan still crushed his throat in his right hand.

"He'd dead Brendan.....You can let go of him." Said Magda.

Brendan had killed two men for Mabina, both dealers in exotic herbs and drugs. That had felt different, no hate had been involved. After the vodka induced nap he'd felt wide awake. Now he wanted nothing more than somewhere to lie down and sleep for a very long time. He dropped Sam's lifeless body between two rose bushes.

"Are you alright Brendan ? This isn't the time to fall apart, we need to dispose of the body."

"You're not going to tell the guards ?"

"No, I wanted Sam dead, probably more than you." Said Magda. "He can't be found though.... Do you think you can carry the body to his car ? He is quite heavy."

"Easy, what then though ?"

"We have factions in the order, those who will help me. I can give you a name and a number, but you must drive Sam's car and deliver his body. I would be missed, but the guards take no notice of you."

Sam's body went over his shoulder and Brendan walked towards the car park. The world was beginning to feel unreal, he really needed to sleep.

"Don't drift Brendan..... Do you remember what I said ?"

"Yes, there are factions. I must call the number you give me and they will take care of Sam."

"And the car, it must never be found."

"I know Magda.... Despite what you may think, I'm not an idiot."

"Sorry Brendan, that was said in the heat of the moment."

The keys were in the car, Sam was obviously relying on them being miles from any would be car thieves. They wrapped Sam's body in a car rug and put it in the boot.

"Call Mabina, or Laura.....Actually Laura might be a cooler head. Be careful over the phone, I'll leave the exact words to you, I do know you're not a fool. Something along the lines of the house being under new management, but you're still unsure about the men from Jerusalem. Even if they don't understand, they'll be cautious when they get back."

Magda sat in the car and wrote a name and number on the back of one of Sam's business cards.

"Promise me you'll come back Brendan, you have to come back. If you vanish about the same time as Sam..... You have to come back."

"I will, I'd never desert Liz. I'll get a cab back to the end of the lane and walk the rest."

As he was about to drive off, she leant into the open window and kissed his cheek. Magda looked terrified.

"Don't worry Magda. I give you my word, I'll be back as soon as I can."

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When the tunnel ended, at least it was somewhere with plenty of light. Unfortunately the room was full of men armed with clubs and swords. Again there was a medieval feel to their clothing and the weapons they carried. As the men saw them, they began shouting in a language Laura didn't understand.

"Eventually we have to find someone who is pleased to see us." Said Liz. "It has to happen, just by the law of averages."

So Liz had a sense of humour. It was nice to know, but didn't help the current situation.

"We don't want to hurt you." Yelled Laura.

No good, two of the men lunged at her with ancient looking weapons. Maybe ancient, but still deadly. Laura didn't even consider trying to disarm them, she easily side stepped their blows and broke their necks.

"You can't win, just leave us alone."

They didn't look as keen on attacking. There were still a lot of them though and not a single one of them was moving out of the way. A voice behind them shouted out in the same unintelligible language the men had used. The armed men still looked wary, but they did move back against the wall. A tall man was stood behind the men, beckoning to them and smiling.

"This way, I've been expecting you." He said. "Well not you exactly, though I knew someone would arrive eventually."

"I told you Laura." Whispered Liz. "You can't beat the law of averages."

"I'll be happy if he hasn't tried to kill us within the next ten minutes." Muttered Laura.

They followed their smiling new friend along several different corridors and through many doors. All the time Laura felt closer to the Circle of Arcardis. As they entered what looked like the man's bedroom, she knew the Circle was there, even though she couldn't see it. He was offering a hand to be shaken, which she took. It would have seemed impolite not to.

"I am so pleased you came." He said. "I'm Sir Andrew Mordaunt."

"Laura..... Laura Selway and this is Liz Grant."

Sir Andrew had a firm hand shake, though like the guards on the door, he didn't feel right. Hardly surprising for a man who was supposed to be long dead.

"You must have come for the Circle of Arcardis." Said Andrew. "To be honest I've been hoping someone would arrive to take it for so long.....I'd almost given up hope."

Not the reaction she'd expected, but then again, she hadn't expected to be met by a man who was dead and presumably buried. Liz was rolling her eyes at her.

"Oh, you expected to have to fight for it?" Asked Andrew. "This world is a piece of the rifts carved off by Arcardis himself, I have little control over what happens here. The doorway below my house is mine though, I set the rules. Only true immortals can activate the doorway. Only those with a genuine desire for knowledge. No vampires of course, they're definitely not welcome."

Sir Andrew began to have an argument with himself. Mildly alarming, but then again, he had been trapped in a small bubble universe for decades.

"I told you filtering out non-immortals was a mistake." He hissed at himself. "No..... Oh no, you're not blaming me for this mess. Immortals won't need the power of the Circle, we agreed on that.

Much safer, oh yes.....No damn vampires either."

"I'm a vampire." Said Laura, feeling she was interrupting.

"Oh."

He looked her over, as if looking for a nasty smell on the bottom of his shoe.

"Not all vampire." He said. "I used to be quite bad at discerning such things. I'm much better at it now I'm dead. You're something else too, always have been. Yes my girl, there's something far darker and older in there with you, just waiting to get out."

"What am I?" Asked Liz.

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Doesn't know what it is." Muttered Andrew. "So much for your silly rules for the doorway. Shut up..... Shut up!!"

After his internal battle, Andrew looked Liz over, even sniffing at her for a moment. It seemed he needed a clockwork device of some kind from a drawer. Laura grabbed his hand as he aimed it at Liz.

"Careful..... You may be dead, but I'm sure I can give you pain."

"No, no..... You're my saviours. I was a necromancer, you must have heard? I like to think I was one of the best. My machine will not harm your friend."

"Let him use it Laura, I have to know what I am." Said Liz.

Definitely not high tech, the device had no flashing lights or dials. Andrew used a key to wind it, just three turns. The noise it made was obviously clockwork, the sound of gears and cog wheels moving, turning. After it had finished Andrew still took another sniff at Liz.

"So, what am I?" Asked Liz.

"Dangerous my dear, very dangerous. I have read extensively on the religious rights of ancient Egypt and as I've mentioned, being dead has given me a deeper insight. You hold the Nameless One within you, the finally guardian of the twelfth and final gate into the underworld."

"That's it, she's just the Nameless One?" Asked Laura.

"There's no just about it." Snapped Andrew. "Even in the oldest texts of forbidden knowledge, the final keeper is only ever called the Nameless One. Some have even attributed her with Godlike powers."

"At least I'm a she then."

"Gender is meaningless in such things Liz. I might even have a picture somewhere, something drawn on a wall by a poor artist I'm afraid, but....."

He was digging through a drawer, throwing dusty piles of papyrus onto his bed.

"You said you're dead." Said Laura. "Several times now, but I'm picking up a heartbeat."

"Ahhh yes, one of the skills from your vampire side."

He eventually blew the dust off a picture and handed it to Liz.

“No, no..... I can’t be..... This.” She yelled.

Poor Liz was actually in a heap on the floor, sobbing. If the picture was worse than the creature Laura had seen her become in the woods, she had to see the picture. She bent down to pick it up from the floor.

“No..... It’s too dreadful.” Said Liz.

Her right hand became black writhing tentacles. Liz touched the papyrus and it crumbled to dust. Andrew gave Liz a slight bow.

“This place usually negates the power to do such things.” He said. “You must be immensely powerful. I have tried to use my own powers to summon help in this prison, but nothing works. When it seemed to work, some truly terrible creatures arrived.”

“We saw the wolves in the woods.” Said Laura.

“There are far worse than those Laura.” Said Andrew. “The deep woods hide a few real monsters, bad enough to be dangerous even to vampires.”

His other side wasn’t keen on him helping her.

“Don’t tell her everything you idiot..... She’s one of them, the hated vampires.”

Laura sat him down on the bed and held his head so that he couldn’t look away. It was strange that he called himself a dead man. True his body was a little cool, cooler than hers. Andrew didn’t feel right in some way, but he had a good strong heartbeat. For good or ill, she decided to use her thrall skill on him.

“Andrew listen to me.....You needn’t fear me, I mean you no harm. You will answer my questions honestly and accurately. Do you understand ?”

“Yes Laura.”

His voice was a little robotic, she thought he might be faking. Dilated pupils indicated he was under her influence.

“How can you be dead Andrew ?” She asked.

“It’s the Circle, it grants its keeper genuine immortality. Not the few centuries a vampire is likely to survive, but everlasting life, if you can call this life. My soul went somewhere, I felt it go Laura. Can you even imagine how that feels ?”

“I’m not sure.....Being turned by Simon felt..... I’m not sure.”

“Oh, you’re still in there Laura, that unique spark. I’m left arguing with the person I once was.... He wasn’t a nice man. Once you take the Circle away from this place I will die, real death, the type that lasts forever. This world was created by Arcardis as a home for his golden bangle, but I’ve been here so long and I’ve tried to stretch it and break it so many times. My door was supposed to work both ways, but Arcardis loved his tricks.....I think this reality will fall apart after I die and take all the creatures here with it.”

“Are the people here real ?” Asked Liz.

“Answer her.” Said Laura.

“Yes, as real as you are....More real, they’re completely human. I might have inadvertently trapped some of them, though the town towards the edge of the lake was here when I arrived. Some even speak English. They grow their cops and brew their ale. Some even work for me in exchange for a little gold. They squabble and fight though.....I think most will see it as a mercy when this world ends. You said I was dead and buried Laura, that confuses me.”

“I’ve seen a picture of your grave Andrew, the Psochics even searched your house.”

"It must have appeared as though I'd vanished, which of course I did. I can only assume my relatives wanted their inheritance. They must have buried an empty coffin."

"Your family sounds delightful." Said Liz.

"Oh, if you only knew the half of it..... The me that used to be, would have attempted to resurrect their bodies to have the pleasure of torturing them to death. If this place has done one good thing, it has mellowed my anger.....I now pity them."

"Where is the Circle ?" Asked Laura.

"I know it calls you Laura. If you're looking for my permission to take it, you have it. The Circle of Arcadis is where it has always been since I found it, under my pillow."

The bed looked old, a reddish stain was coming up from the rusty springs in the mattress. The pillow looked older than the bed, a good part of it was home to creeping grey mould. Underneath the pillow was an arm ring made of gold. She reached out to take it, but hesitated.

"If I take it, will this world end ?" She asked.

"No, you have to take it out of this reality. You can trust me Laura, I have no reason to lie to you."

It made her fingers tingle as she picked up the arm band and put it on her wrist. She pushed it up her lower arm until it gripped tight, just above her elbow. Just a simple torque made of gold, it seemed so harmless.

"I intended to summon a creature to take me home." She said. "After what you said about the monsters in the forest.....It is a creature from another reality. What do you think Andrew ?"

"I assumed you'd have a full proof way home Laura, you've disappointed me." He replied.

Liz was glaring at her, but at least she wasn't voicing her criticism.

"Just answer me Andrew. Do you think my Gudara will arrive safely ?"

"A Gudara, you are indeed blessed by someone Laura Selway. Something will arrive, but I guarantee it won't look or behave as you expect. I suspect a larger and far more dangerous creature will be added to those already in the woods."

"Fuck..... We're stuck here." Said Liz.

"Nonsense.... Someone with your powers Liz. You should be able to quite literally knock a hole out of this reality."

"Maybe, but my powers arrived as part of a consequence..... There was no set of instructions included."

"Oh..... You're both so..... Disappointing." Muttered Andrew.

Her father had used that word all the time, it still had power enough to make her heart beat faster. As a child, being a disappointment seemed to be a cardinal sin, right up there with Pride, Greed and Lust. There was a way home of course, if it worked.

"I have a way home, I'm just not sure if I can take Liz with me." Said Laura. "I have a key to the abyss, it was a gift from Horus."

"Now lies.....Laura, dear Laura..... As if I'd believe one of the greatest and oldest of Gods would have given you such a gift. Anyway, I'd have felt it on you when you arrived."

"It's under my skin, right up against my ribs. I can feel it rubbing slightly if I lift something heavy."

Andrew became animated, winding up his clockwork device.

"That does sound familiar.... If only I could remember..... May I ?"

He was holding the device away from her, as if he'd just remembered she was a vampire and capable of inflicting a great deal of pain, even on an immortal.

"Yes, run that thing over me if you like. No more calling me a liar though Andrew, my patience isn't without limits."

The machine had barely touched her skin before he was prostrating himself on the ground in front of her.

"I am unworthy.....To think I insulted one who had spoken to him, who has his key. I am your servant to command."

"Get up Andrew, the key is just on loan for a while."

"I saw him once Laura, though he was quite some distance away. That moment it is one of my most precious memories. You talked to him didn't you ? Of course you did, please forgive this fool."

"You're forgiven..... Just get up. Sit on the bed, so I can talk to you."

Andrew sat on the bed, though he kept his gaze firmly on the floor. He was muttering to himself, while rocking backwards and forwards.

"I think you broke him." Said Liz.

"You don't understand." Said Andrew. "Horus is the oldest of the ancient Gods. Everything that came after was built on his powers. You Liz, the being you've become was probably caused by his power."

"We'd sort of guessed that." Said Liz.

"Are you ready for this Liz ?" Asked Laura. "I can probably use the key to get us both out of here. I'll be honest though, I can't guarantee you'll survive. It definitely wasn't my first choice as a way home."

"It doesn't seem we have any other options." Said Liz. "I'm ready."

"No not yet, there are the scrolls and drawings." Said Andrew. "You must know a scholar who can read them. They've taken me a lifetime to collect. I'll be quick....."

The leather bag was fairly moth eaten, but it held all the papyrus and paper that came out of several drawers. No real care, everything jammed in as tight as it would go. As he handed her the bag, she hugged him.

"Thank you Andrew, if there was a way to get you out of here."

"No, I've lived this sham life far too long. The Circle will like you, a vampire that can grow old through countless centuries, without being diminished. Don't let it be your master though. If I could ask one favour ?"

"Yes, of course."

"Put a few flowers on my grave. A silly trivial thing I know, but it matters to me."

"I'll do it, you have my word."

"Me too." Added Liz.

"Come on Liz, time to go home." Said Laura.

"Just one final thing." Said Andrew. "I'm sure Horus will allow you to take Liz with you, but there is always a price associated with such things."

"I know, someone wise told me I already owe him a quid pro quo. Not that I can see what sort of favour an omnipotent God would want from me."

"Quid pro quo, yes that is a good way to put it." Said Andrew. "I think you may be surprised at what the ancient Gods require from you. Goodbye Laura Selway."

"Goodbye Andrew."

Laura held Liz tightly, hugging her to her. As Liz hugged back, she used her left hand to push on her lower chest, pushing the metal disk hard against her ribs. It hurt, though the pain was tolerable.

"Everything important comes with pain." She muttered.

"What was that ?"

"Nothing Liz, just hold on really tight."

Laura saw Horus briefly as they moved through a world that was nothing but gold mist and empty space. He turned his head in her direction, but said nothing. They arrived back in the cellar of Andrew's house. Mabina and Millicent Spooner were still there and looking surprised by their sudden reappearance.

"You were gone for about ten seconds." Said Mabina. "We hadn't even had a chance to go upstairs. Did you get it, is it in the bag?"

Laura checked Liz before answering. To her relief she looked fine and was even smiling.

"There was a moment..... I did wonder if we'd ever get home again." She said. "This may be a crappy cellar with a burnt wall, but I love being here."

The wall was no longer glowing, even when Laura reached out towards it. It really did look as though the reality created by Arcadis had ceased to exist. Mabina was obviously fed up with being ignored, she reached for the bulging leather bag.

"We got it, though it's not in there." Said Laura. "The bag contains the arcane knowledge collected by Sir Andrew Mordaunt, over the course of a very long lifetime."

"I've heard of his collection." Said Millicent. "It vanished, or so they say. Must be priceless."

"Come on then..... Show me the Circle of Arcadis." Said Mabina.

Laura took off her jacket and showed them all the circle of gold on her upper arm. Mabina prodded at it, as though it might bite.

"That's it, what all the fuss was about." Said Millicent. "How disappointing."

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