

The Hornsey Vampires

(Season two of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 23 – Ancient Observances

“Magda will be helping me perform a truly ancient ceremony, observances to the ways of the old Gods. Such things should be witnessed.”

»

Laura woke up and looked the room over, wondering where she was for a couple of seconds. Recognition brought conflicting emotions. She was pleased to be waking up next to Tim Chance after a night of unhurried sex, but his room was truly dreadful. Her room in Hornsey was often untidy, his was borderline squalid. Worst of all was having to walk some distance to use the shared bathroom. True he was getting the staff accommodation rent free, it was just so..... Awful.

“Damn..... First day back at work.” She muttered.

No commute at least, no fight to get on a Piccadilly Line train after changing at Finsbury Park. All she had to do was hope there was still a little hot water in the bathroom. Tim was still asleep, so she gently bit his upper arm. No vampire fangs, just a gentle lover's nibble with her human teeth. No good, he was still sound asleep.

“Wake up Tim; we're both on duty in half an hour.”

“What ?..... Are you sure ? I thought it was Sunday.”

His right buttock was sticking out from under the sheet, she couldn't resist giving it a slap.

“No, it's Monday..... Get up, I'll race you to the bathroom.”

“Are you sure it's Monday Laura ?”

“Positive.”

He had a chest of drawers that doubled as a dressing table. She'd put her phone on it and a few items of personal cosmetics, a lipstick, some eyeshadow and a spray on deodorant. It was the closest she was ever likely to come to having a permanent presence in his room. She had to crouch slightly to look at her phone. A text from Mabina had come in at three in the morning.

‘Magda called me. Call me later.’

Laura had to crouch just about everywhere, the room was under a weird bit of the roof. The only place you could stand upright was right in the centre of the room, under the one bare lightbulb.

“Don't go back to sleep Tim..... Why did you let them give you this room ?”

“I'm a trainee, we get the shit rooms.”

He said it as though it was the eleventh commandment. She'd brought clean clothes and shower gel, but no dressing gown, or slippers. She's risk the dirty floors, but walking the corridors naked was likely to mean another interview with the harridan from HR. She grabbed a spare blanket from the back of a rickety chair. Shaking it produced two dead moths.

“I think part of your charm is that you make me look house proud.”

Laura wrapped the blanket round herself and clicked the latch to unlock the door.

“You'll need a towel, there's one hanging over the wardrobe door.”

“Oh, right.”

The towel was still a bit damp, though it did look reasonably clean. Another try at opening the door and again she didn't make it into the hall. A naked Tim sat on the edge of the bed wasn't the most romantic of sights, but she did think the world of him. Laura kissed him on the forehead.

“Don't look at my phone, I'm involved in some weird shit at the moment.” She said.

“When aren’t you ?..... Go on.... Shower and give me time to wake up.”

Towel over her shoulder, shower gel in hand, she walked down the corridor. There were two staff bathrooms, both quite small. There was a cleaning rota, which meant both of them were usually fairly grubby. The first bathroom was locked, the sound of running water coming from inside. By some miracle the second one was empty, the door open. Laura went inside and looked around. It was one of those times when she was grateful vampires were immune to most infectious diseases. Of course the water was cold.

“Just get through today and be ready to meet the others tonight.” She muttered.

~ ~

Simon wasn’t enjoying his Monday that much either. His third cup of coffee still wasn’t doing the job of waking him up. It was month end figures day; he’d arrived in the office at a ridiculously early hour. Everyone came to see him, whether they liked it or not. Some would get a little praise, some quite a lot of threats, it was a tradition. Another tradition was Veronica Neophytou exceeding all her targets.

“If only everyone was like this Ronnie....Though you know what it means ?” He asked.

“I get a big fat bonus payment this month.”

“Yes, you do..... I’ll also be increasing your target for next month.”

He liked Ronnie, she was bright and realised the connection between hard work and success, many didn’t. She was giving him what he thought of as her smacked arse face.

“Oh, that is so unfair.....You’re punishing me for doing well.”

Simon looked at her payroll numbers and even though he knew them almost by heart, he was still impressed.

“You’re likely to make a hundred grand this year Ronnie, on top of your basic.” He said. “If I push you a little, it’s for your own good. I think you have it in you to make a hundred and thirty grand by the end of the year.”

“Yeah, yeah.....It just feels like a disincentive. How about adding a car to my package ? Nothing flash, just a little run around.”

“You rarely leave the office Ronnie.”

She’d get her car of course, though he had to argue about it for a while, it was expected. The phone on his desk rang, despite him telling everyone he wasn’t to be disturbed all morning.

“Yes ?”

“Sorry Simon, but she’s really insistent.”

“Who is it Jo ? I’ve got a busy morning.”

“A Mrs Gladitch, she says you know her.”

Of course she knew where he worked, she’d once carried out surveillance on his life that the CIA would have been proud of.

“Fine Jo, put her through.”

He looked over the desk at Ronnie.

“Can you give me five minutes ?” He asked.

Oh that face, like an upset toddler.

“You’ll get the car, bring in a few brochures.....Now go away.”

Ronnie left his office just as he heard the voice of Mabina Gladitch.

“Good morning Simon, I hope I caught you at a convenient time ?”

Were they still on the same side, still collaborators ? He thought they were, though things could change quite quickly.

"It's a bit frantic here.....Are you calling about a pension ?"

"Very funny Simon. Laura might have mentioned that the ceremony is tonight."

"Yes, she did."

"I'd like you to be there, you and Clara. Actually bring Patsy too, tell her she's forgiven, though she does owe me some replacement bed sheets."

He cringed a little. There were times when Patsy seemed to forget she was a fragile human and how easily Mabina could kill her.

"What did Patsy do ?" He asked

"A little prank, nothing of note. I could smell her all over my house when I returned home. Relax Simon, I have no intention of harming her. Bring her, there will be others there who aren't..... Like us."

"You really want us there Mabina ?"

"Yes, it's more than just a mindless ritual. Magda will be helping me perform a truly ancient ceremony, observances to the ways of the old Gods. Such things should be witnessed. Liz Grant will be there and Brendan Roche. Sadly no one can find Sam Isaacs, we'll have to cope without his expertise. Will you come ?"

"I'd like to..... Have you spoken to Clara ? We do come as a pair."

"Like bookends.... No, she's harder to contact than you. Clara is showing a couple how splendid the hotel will be for their upcoming nuptials. She hates me anyway. Please bring her Simon, and Patsy. Convince them that they'll be very welcome in my house."

"I'll do my best, though..."

"Good, see you tonight."

Damn, she'd gone and he had no idea if Clara would want to go. He leant back in his chair and looked at the ceiling, while thinking of the best way to convince her to attend the ceremony. Patsy was almost certain to say yes, just out of curiosity. He was still looking at the ceiling when Ronnie entered his office.

"Finished ?" She asked. "I did have these in my desk drawer."

She was holding the brochure for a luxury Mercedes that had to cost at least ten times the budget he had in mind. It was going to be one of those days.

~ ~

Liz thought she'd earned her place at the ceremony after being dragged into a bubble universe. She'd arrived outside Mabina's house with Brendan. They hadn't talked about the future yet, but she was definitely going to keep seeing him.

"I used to dread coming here sometimes." Said Brendan. "I'd still prefer to be somewhere else."

"We're needed as witnesses. Mabina seems to think that's important."

Liz pressed the doorbell and heard nothing. Just in case it wasn't working, she thumped her fist on the door. After a while, Laura opened the door.

"We're using the kitchen door, didn't anyone tell you ?" Asked Laura. "Never mind, come in.....Everyone is having drinks and nibbles in the lounge."

They followed Laura along a dimly lit corridor.

"I never even knew there was a lounge" Said Brendan. "And I lived here for a while."

"A back parlour, strictly for Christmas and funerals only." Said Laura.

"Or strange rituals." Added Liz.

The room was quite small and had the look of being cleaned and dusted in a hurry. The plates full of tiny triangular sandwiches and bottles of sherry, really did remind Liz of family gatherings after a funeral.

"You're not the last to arrive." Said Laura. "Magda is on her way, caught in traffic. She's bringing Yosef with her. Mabina suspects he's going to arrive armed, in the role Magda's bodyguard."

"Not that she needs one, we're all friends here." Said Mabina.

Mabina, dressed in something black and clingy that probably cost a fortune. Liz had put on jeans and a floppy jumper and felt underdressed.

"I'll assume you know no one and point everyone out to you." Said Mabina.

"Thank you." Said Liz.

"Right..... The man with the very green eyes is Simon and the lady next to him is Clara. Like me they are both creatures of the night, Nosferatu. It was important to have witnesses who are long lived, even if few of our kind survive to reach a truly remarkable age."

"He looks how I imagined he'd look." Said Liz. "Right down to the slightly crumpled shirt."

"Laura you know of course." Continued Mabina. "The woman with her, the one pouring a glass of amontillado is Patsy. I held her hostage once, but we're friend again now."

The look on Patsy's face was saying they weren't friends at all. Mabina actually hit a bottle with a soon to get everyone's attention.

"This is Liz and Brendan." She barked. "Make them welcome, we're all friends here tonight."

"And tomorrow I hope." Said Laura.

The worst thing was going to be working out who knew what. Liz knew Brendan had killed Sam and disposed of the body. With Brendan and his taciturn nature, she was working on the assumption that almost everyone else thought Sam had simply gone on one of his trips. His guards seemed to think that, they'd simply accepted Magda as their temporary boss. What would happen when temporary drifted into becoming permanent? Liz thought that like the guards who'd looked after Caesar, they'd shift their loyalties to the new emperor, the new leader of the Psochic Order. There was no money in avenging a dead boss.

"Come on, we should mingle."

Brendan showed no signs of moving, so she grabbed his hand and took him over to see Simon and Clara. The vampire couple fascinated her, mainly because they were an unknown at the gathering.

"Hello, we've never met, but I feel I know you." Said Liz.

"We know you, Laura talks about you all the time." Said Simon.

Simon seemed friendly, so did Clara. There was something about Clara though, the way she was examining her.

"I suspect you're the most important witness here Liz." Said Clara.

"Me!? I was just needed as an interpreter."

"No false modesty, you're the Nameless One." Said Clara. "Not that I know what that is, but you're a genuine immortal. You'll be a living witness to Mabina's ritual long after Simon and I are just dust on the ground somewhere."

"On a more cheerful note, we might be in for a little trouble." Whispered Simon.

"Why?" Asked Brendan.

"You can't whisper in a room full of vampires." Said Liz. "I mean you can, but they'll still hear you. I haven't learnt much since all this started, but that one is Vampire 101."

"It's alright, Mabina and Laura know." Said Simon. "And of course, Clara caused the problem."

"Thank you Simon.... When do we start on your bad decisions?"

Liz thought they were having a genuine squabble, until they laughed and kissed. They were odd, there was no doubt about it. They were vampires though and had probably been around since Methuselah was a young man.

“So, do you want the long story or the short ?” Asked Clara.

“Please say the short version.” Said Simon.

“Shut up..... Pest.”

There was a ring at the doorbell; it appeared they weren't the only ones to go to the wrong door. It was probably Magda, which left only one answer to Clara's question.

“The short version I think.” Said Liz.

“I will admit it was silly.” Said Clara. “I became involved with one of Sam's people, a woman. Only a one night thing..... It ended badly, just about as badly as it could end.”

“Did you kill her ?” Asked Liz.

“No excuses, I messed it up..... They knew who I was and tried to set an ambush for me. I ended up with her dead body in a sleazy hotel in Shoreditch.”

“Christ !” Said Brendan.

“To cut to the chase, Sam knew about it and so did his people in London. They will have talked to Judith and you can guarantee Magda will have called Judith. I think we'll know fairly quickly after she arrives, if Magda has gone onto a war footing.”

“Does she know you killed this woman ?” Asked Liz.

“Missing, she's probably thought of as missing..... But with Sam also missing.....”

Magda entered the room with not just Yosef, but also two other large and probably armed men. Liz exchanged a smile with Clara.

~ ~

Mabina Gladitch knew that many in the room wanted her dead. It didn't worry her, she thrived on such things. It reminded her of the days when she'd ruled much of the area now known as Bulgaria and Romania. No less than twenty of her cousins had tried to end her reign by violence. Magda and her policemen from Jerusalem didn't worry her.

“My dear Magda, I see you brought a few friends.”

“And I see you've invited two more of your kind.” Replied Magda.

Mabina hadn't thought of Simon and Clara as bodyguards, they were in her mental group of those who wanted to kill her. No use telling that to Magda, she'd just think she was lying.

“We're all here for the ceremony.” Said Mabina. “Admit it; you're as keen as I am on carrying out the ritual in front of an audience.”

“Perhaps..... We need to talk. Somewhere private, away from those with sharp hearing.”

“Leave your private army here, we'll go downstairs. I can show you where the ceremony will actually happen.”

Magda was hesitating and there were beads of sweat on her forehead.

“Oh, come on Magda, I have no reason to harm you. You can't avoid being alone with me for the entire evening.”

Mabina walked towards the stairs to the basement, with Magda following a few paces behind her. The door code to the basement had been changed. As a sign of good faith she gave the number to Magda and made sure she remembered it.

“Wow, this looks impressive.” Said Magda.

“I did it all myself, raking over the soil floor to hide any past..... Unpleasantness.”

Mabina had worked hard to create a certain atmosphere in the basement. Low lighting, rows of chairs placed in a semi-circle, all angled to get a perfect view of the event. There was only one thing worrying her, nagging at the back of her mind. Supposing they carried out the ritual and nothing happened ?

“You do realise there’s no significance in the soil floor for this ceremony ?” Asked Magda.

“I know, just trying to add a certain something. I did think of using my work room, but this looks much better. I remember that from my days of being a Queen, the people love a spectacle. Now Magda, what do you want to talk about ?”

“I take it there’s no point in asking you to take the Psochic oath ?”

“No, I never intended to take an oath to obey your rules.”

Poor Magda, she looked so scared, constantly looking around the room, as though something might leap out to bite her.

“I could leave here.” Said Magda. “You’d never be able to carry out the ceremony without me.”

“Maybe, maybe not. Laura has acquired the lost knowledge of Sir Andrew Mordaunt and has a few powerful allies now. Plus I do have my own copy of the Psochic Bible, with notes by the original author. It might take me a century to work out the ritual..... But I’m not getting any older.”

“I was always telling Sam he was too soft. I can’t come out of this with nothing Mabina. You have to give me something.”

There was truth in her words and Mabina really didn’t want to spend decades trying to decipher the ancient knowledge Laura had brought back from Mordaunt’s bubble universe.

“Laura has become quite attached to some of the artefacts, quite literally in the case of the Egg of Astaroth. You can have the three items used in the ceremony, I’ll have no further use for them. They’re all valuable items that probably have arcane uses you haven’t told me about. Take those after the ceremony is over. You can put them in a glass case in your office.”

“You know about Sam, don’t you ?” Asked Magda.

“Yes, though I’ll keep your secret.”

Poor Magda, looking about like a scared bunny. Mabina gave her six months, maybe a year, before someone tougher and more ambitious took over as leader of the Psochics.

“Very well.... I’ll take the Half Moon of Thoth, the Scales of Pendally and the Tooth of the Saint.”

Magda was holding her hand out and Mabina shook it.

“No deliberately getting the ritual wrong Magda. If anything terrible should happen to me.....”

“Don’t worry, you’re right. I’m as keen as you on seeing the ritual work.”

“Alright, let’s get our audience and begin.” Said Mabina.

~ ~

There was no seating plan and Liz had insisted on sitting right at the front.

“I want to see this Brendan, we have no idea what might happen.”

At first it reminded him of street magicians, as Mabina sat in large wooden chair that looked like a throne. Magda was stood at a table behind the ancient queen, a table covered in artefacts, bowls, jars and paper bags full of ingredients of some kind.

“Firstly I have to say you are likely to see some strange things tonight.” Said Magda. “Flashes of light, strange smells, maybe even a few ghostly apparitions. You are the witnesses to this historic event, it’s important that you remain calm.”

There was the sound of people muttering to each other, but trying to be very quiet about it.

“Sounds dangerous.” Muttered Brendan.

“All part of the performance.” Replied Liz. “There’s a lot of P T Barnum in our Magda.”

Magda came from behind the table carrying a small stainless steel bowl and a something contained in a plastic bag.

"This isn't compulsory." Said Magda. "Those who wish to be witnesses must give a little blood. There is no risk involved, just two drops from the end of a finger will do."

She held up the plastic bag.

"I have lancets, more than enough for everyone. Used once and thrown away and as you can see I'm wearing rubber gloves. No chance of cross infection, there is no health risk at all. Please raise your hand if you want to give two drops of your blood and be a witness."

Brendan raised his hand, as did Liz. He looked around the room and everyone seemed to have raised their hand, even Patsy.

"Are we included?" Asked Yosef.

The off duty police were right at the back, sat on chairs near the door.

"Yes, if you wish to be."

Yosef put his hand up and the other cops raised their hands a second or so later.

"Sucking up to Magda." Muttered Liz.

As with any communal activity, people chatted as Magda came around with her bowl, pricking fingers and collecting her offerings of blood.

"Thank you Brendan."

She said when it was his turn to have his finger tip pricked and squeezed. It took a surprising amount of time to collect her bowl of blood, which was probably just a thin smear at the bottom.

"Complete quiet now everyone, I'll soon begin the ritual." Said Magda.

She poured liquid into the bowl which looked like more blood. After mixing in a few ingredients from several bags and jars, the whole lot went into the silver bowl Laura had recovered from Clufford Hall. Magda gave it all another stir with the blunt dagger, the Tooth of the Saint.

"Quiet!" She yelled. "Not a word now until the ceremony is over."

Magda held up the bowl, right up above her head. She muttered for a while in a language he didn't understand. She brought the bowl to Mabina, holding the vampire queen's left hand above the bowl.

"From the left come those who would oppose you." Said Magda.

Mabina winced as she used a small knife to cut her own hand. Brendan couldn't see how much of his queen's blood went into the bowl. Next Magda moved to her right hand.

"From the right will come those as yet unnamed."

Another cut, more of Mabina's blood added to the contents of the silver bowl. Magda took the bowl back to the table and muttered over it for at least five minutes. No one in the room said a word, all eyes were on Magda as she lifted the crystal above the bowl, the Half Moon of Thoth.

"Come to me, Thoth, O noble Ibis. O god who longs for Khmunu."

Everyone jumped as the small flash of light left the crystal and hit the contents of the bowl. It was like a small bright lightning flash on a dark day. Brendan's eyes were actually hurting from the intensity of the light. Someone shouted, though he couldn't make out what they'd said.

"Quiet!" Shouted Magda. "The slightest mistake could be fatal and not just to Mabina."

Did she mean them, the witnesses? It seemed no one was sure, the room became completely silent once again. Magda walked slowly round the table and placed the bowl on Mabina's lap.

"Do you claim rebirth from mighty Thoth?"

"I do." Said Mabina.

"This one claims rebirth, O dispatch-writer of the Ennead, the great one of Unu." Shouted Magda.

Two more flashes of light, one hitting the bowl, the other lighting up the top of Mabina's head. It's amazing how quickly people can become used to the inexplicable. No one gasped or seemed shocked by the intense flashes of light.

A lot more muttering in a strange language, as Magda used her fingers to paint Mabina's face with the contents of the bowl. Magda took a sip of the dreadful concoction, before lifting the bowl to Mabina's mouth.

"Drink deep and live forever."

Mabina took the bowl and put it to her lips. It was impossible to see how much she drank, but her throat moved as though she was swallowing quite a lot. Magda prostrated herself in front of Mabina, flattening herself against the grubby dirt floor.

"It is done, only Thoth can decide the outcome."

Mabina was covered from head to foot in a green glow. It pulsed up and down her body. Magda got to her feet.

"She'll be like that for about a day. Locked inside there like a butterfly inside a pupa." She said. "Now I intend to take the artefacts I was promised and leave. Don't get in the way of my associates and you won't be harmed."

There was no panic or real concern, most there probably didn't understand what she meant. Magda wiped the silver bowl, before handing it to Yosef. Another of Magda's hired cops picked up the blunt dagger and the crystal. All might have gone quietly and peacefully, with Magda leaving after taking the holy relics. Simon's voice changed all that.

"I don't think so Magda.....Drop what you've stolen."

Someone fired a gun, the sound seemed to come from somewhere quite near them. One of the cops threw something across the cellar. A smoke grenade, but not just smoke. Brendan found himself coughing, his eyes streaming. Not Liz though, she seemed unaffected.

"Stay here Brendan, I'll deal with it."

Everyone was making choking noises, but not Liz. She took a gun out of her bag and walked into the wall of smoke.

~ ~

Simon and Clara had been fighting together for a long time; they had a routine used so often it had burned itself into their muscle memory. If they were shot at, it was all about zigzagging. Simon zigged to the right and Clara zagged to the left. He moved quickly, yet someone had managed to take a lump out of his ear with a bullet. He charged into the cloud of white smoke and found a large man with a gun in his hand. One of Magda's hired goons. Even if he wasn't the one who'd disfigured his ear, he was going to suffer because of it.

"Bastard, see this ?!" Simon yelled.

He was using one hand to point to his ear, while his other had the man by the throat.

"It won't grow back..... I'm stuck with this now."

Not surprisingly the man tried to raise his gun again. Simon had wanted to give him a slow and agonising death. Circumstances made that impossible, so he rammed the man's head against the wall a few times. A stone basement wall combined with vampire strength and the man was probably dead after the first try. The smoke was beginning to clear, he saw someone approaching him.

"Liz, since when did you carry a gun ?"

There was a look in her eyes, a look that made him wonder if his long life was about to come to an end. The serious looking gun was aimed at his head, the right target to get the job done. Liz aimed

the gun to his right and fired twice. Yosef had been about to jam a six inch blade into his back, but now he was dead.

"Thank you."

Liz just nodded at him and moved away into what was left of the smoke.

"Crap, it has the feel of being a really weird day." He muttered.

Another shot and someone screamed, the deep voiced scream of a man in pain. It was almost instinctive for Simon to head in the direction of the scream. Wounded people usually meant an easy meal, though on this occasion he found Liz kneeling over Brendan.

"How bad is it?" He asked. "There's a hospital a few streets away."

Liz looked at him through the blackest eyes he had ever seen.

"He's dead."

A crash behind him. Simon turned to see Clara deal with the last of Magda's cops. There was blood on her face, though probably not hers. She pushed the cop down onto his knees before using her fangs on him. Only to keep him quiet. Clara put her knee in his back and pulled his head sideways until the man went limp. He'd be dead, no one survives having their spinal cord snapped.

"Magda..... She's at the door..... Don't let he escape." Yelled Liz.

"Don't worry, I won't."

Laura beat him to it, grabbing Magda as she tried to enter the door code to leave. The cause of all the violence and Brendan's death, was sat in a chair and warned not to move.

"Kill her, we'll never be able to trust her after this." Said Clara.

"Mabina said I could have those three items." Said Magda. "I was only taking what was agreed."

"Did Mabina mention that to you Laura?" Asked Simon.

"Not a word, she's talking crap."

"But..... I'm telling the truth. She'll tell you when she wakes up." Pleaded Magda. "I never wanted anyone to get hurt."

"I suppose we could wait for Mabina to wake up." Said Clara.

"Yes, do that..... Lock me up if you like. Mabina will tell you....."

Patsy walked really close to Magda, a gun in her right hand. A heavy gun, her hand was trembling. Patsy had probably picked up a gun dropped by one of the dead cops. Magda screamed as Patsy pulled hard back on the trigger. Nothing happened.

"Let me look at that." Said Simon.

Patsy handed him the gun without any argument. She hadn't used a gun before as far as he knew, the safety catch was still set to safe. He checked the magazine though and put a bullet in the chamber, before handing it back to her.

"No..... You can't let her do this." Screamed Magda.

"It's her choice." Said Simon.

It meant losing their contact with the Psochics of course, though that might not be a bad thing. To Simon it seemed that they'd caused a lot of trouble for Laura recently. No one else even spoke or made any effort to stop Patsy moving even closer.

"Get really close and fire at least twice." Shouted Liz.

Patsy aimed at Magda's chest and fired three times. All attention then turned to Liz, still kneeling next to Brendan. Liz's hands had become long thin tendrils, needing at Brendan's chest.

"I should be able to bring him back." Said Liz. "I know I can do it.....I just....I can't get it to work."

"Let me Liz." Said Laura. "Brendan was one of us and I'm not letting any of us die today."

Laura picked Brendan up, before pressing hard on her own chest. They all watched as Laura, with Brendan in her arms, vanished into a golden mist.

~ ~

The church was one of the few places to give her SatNav a hard time. There had once been a thriving village around St Andrew's Church. People had moved off the land though, they still were. Now the half dozen houses in the village didn't even have a pub.

"The church is some way out of town." Said the woman. "Keep on the way you're going for about a mile and turn left just after you pass a blue gate."

Sometimes asking a local was better than any SatNav. Laura knew a country mile was a flexible distance, so she kept her speed down.

"Nice day for it." Said Liz.

Mabina had wanted to come too, until Laura explained their trip to the old churchyard was a personal kind of pilgrimage for her and Liz. Mabina had woken up a day after the ceremony, looking and sounding no different at all.

"It's an internal thing I think, in my mind." Mabina had told her. "I now feel far more focused and able to concentrate. I'm sure there are other changes, which I'll discover over time."

It had all been a bit disappointing really. Simon had hoped Mabina might get wings, or maybe;

"I expected her to wake up glowing, or something."

The blue gate was about a mile and a half down the road, country distances obeyed a separate law of physics.

"It's just a muddy track." Said Liz. "We must be going the wrong way."

"We'll go this way for a ten minutes and turn round if we don't come to a church."

Brendan had wanted to come too; where Liz went, there went Brendan. Laura had left it to Liz to talk him out of coming. The churchyard really did feel like a sacred duty, but neither of them felt comfortable saying that.

"There..... A steeple." Said Laura.

"What sort of church is it?"

"Not sure.... I think his family were just plain vanilla C of E."

St Andrew's was obviously still used, even if only on Sunday. The small car park had been kept clear of weeds and the church itself looked well cared for.

"It's beautiful." Said Liz. "I feel guilty not letting Brendan come."

Brendan was still very much his old self, with no obvious ill effect from being dead for at least fifteen minutes. Having him restored to life was probably going to need repaying with a massive favour to the ancient deities. At the moment Laura was trying not to think about that.

"I'll get the flowers." Said Laura.

The grave stone took them a while to find. The church might have been looked after, but the graveyard had been reclaimed by nature. Laura had scratched herself a few times removing brambles to make sure they had the right grave.

'Sir Andrew Mordaunt.... Loving son of.....'

A few hypocritical lines from a far from loving family, who'd buried an empty coffin to get their inheritance. Laura placed the flowers on the neglected grave.

"I thought it might feel silly putting flowers on an empty grave." Said Liz. "It doesn't though.... Should we say a few words."

"Holy ground can be a risk for my kind.....I might combust or something. You can say something, if you want to."

Liz simply placed her flowers on the grave and thanked Andrew for helping them. She stood up and started pointing towards the church.

“We’ve disturbed someone from their afternoon nap.” She said.

Two people, a couple holding hands. Laura didn’t recognise them until their leisurely pace brought them quite close.

“I know them, I’ve seen their faces on something.” She said.

“More enemies ? I was hoping we’d finished fighting people for a while.”

From out of an annexe of her memory two pictures popped into her mind. They were dead of course, but she knew the faces. They were even smiling at her.

“Liz, Meet Walter and Emily Couzinier, once residents of Ottawa in Canada. Dead now, they’ve been dead for some time. Once they were very successful tomb raiders and obtainers of the unobtainable.”

“What do you think they want ?”

Wow Liz had changed. Once she’d have been scared by meeting the dead, now she instantly went for their motives.

“I’m pretty sure they’ve come to tell me the Ancient Gods of Egypt are expecting a little Quid Pro Quo.”

~ ~

~ The End ~

© Ed Cowling – January 2020

Not the real end of course, our North London coterie of vampires will return early in 2020. Book three will be called ‘Quid Pro Quo.’ There are a few loose ends from book two and I’m sure we haven’t seen the last of Judith. Some old characters and some shiny new ones. I also have a feeling that the Order of the Silver Dawn are going to turn up.