

Quid Pro Quo

(Season three of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 27 – Lavender Sweep

“Patsy felt genuine fear as Clara’s fangs dropped. The vampire she thought of as a friend held her in a hug that felt just a little too tight.”

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The altar just inside the final gateway hadn't been designed for human hands. Nor had it been designed for those with normal eyes and ears, or at least normal for a human. The Unnamed One, who had once been Liz Grant, ran her tentacle fingers over the altar in complete and utter darkness. She could see what looked like runes though, carved into various parts of the altar. The runes seemed to call out to her as she recited lines in a language that no one had spoken for.....So long ago it was probably safe to say no human had ever spoken or heard the language. As she finished a line of the holy litany, a rune on the altar called to her and she used her tentacles to thrust deep into the ancient stone altar below the rune. The pleasure was intense; it reminded the Unnamed of sex when she'd been in human form.

“It is good; it is as the prophecy was written.” Said one of the Ancient Gods.

All the time the miniature version of herself was there, hovering next to her, as if defying her in some way. So tempting to destroy the annoyance and she probably would, once the ritual had been completed.

“Next row of runes....Finish it.” Muttered the annoyance.

She knew, of course she knew. The impudence of the creature. When the ritual was finished she'd crush the annoyance and devour its soul. The Unnamed felt drawn to a rune and pushed her tentacle fingers into the stone, penetrating, thrusting. So sexual, it felt as though she was copulating with the altar to give birth to.....Herself.

“Hurry, they sense the gate is unguarded.” Said Osiris.

Did everyone think she was a fool ? She'd felt the tainted and damned souls getting restless, the moment she'd killed the old guardian of the final gate. Millions of them were already on their way, hoping to gain entry into the world of light. She knew none of them were fast enough or clever enough to reach her before the litany had been completed. She spoke the final line and the central rune on the altar actually seemed to sing out to her. The rune of regret....It seemed appropriate.

“Do it....Press It.” Hissed the annoyance.

No, she wouldn't devour its soul, she shred it before allowing the abyss to feed on it for a million years. The Unnamed dug her tentacles into the right spot on the altar and heard an almost orgasmic moan from every one of the Ancient Gods.

“It is done, the gates of Duat are sealed once again.” Said Osiris.

“As it was written and will always be...The Unnamed One is renewed.” Said Horus.

Liz was gone, every single trace of her. The Unnamed was so pleased that she forgot all about ripping apart the miniature form of herself, the annoyance. It was still there though, floating next to her. They'd all gone of course, the ancient Gods. The gate was her problem now, to be guarded and defended for eternity if they wished it. She knew from memories inherited from past guardians that the Gods didn't like to get their hands dirty and she might not see them again for a very long time.

“Now I’ll deal with those filthy vampires.” She muttered.

Somewhere the hint of a very vague memory, let her know she knew the two vampires waiting on the far side of the last gate. Not their names or any details, just a feeling that they had once been friends. The very idea of being friends with such creatures sickened her.

“Stop buzzing round me annoyance. Once I’ve taken care of the vampires, you’ll be next.”

Kill them and release the Hounds of Anubis from their influence. Then she’d be able to stand guard at the gate, knowing there were no immediate threats. She sensed something else, someone else, as she stepped through the gate and into the world of light. The annoyance had followed her through, but there was....

“Urgh....A Seer from the realm of dreams....Another abomination.” She muttered.

The vampires were holding their weapons, but didn’t look ready for battle. Good, she’d crush them before ripping apart the Seer. His blood and viscera on the cobbles would act as a warning to others. She aimed her tentacles at the vampires and began to call on the dark energy that was now hers to command. She’d obliterate the vampires, negating their life forces to leave just a little dust to show where they’d been standing.

“Abominations!” She yelled.

Something grabbed her attention, the damned Seer was up to something. A foolish trick, he’d spun up a small portal. As if she’d be scared or even slightly intimidated by such a thing. The Unnamed used one of her large tentacles to try and crush the....Wiremi, his name entered her mind from somewhere.

“Remember....Look into the portal.”

Now the annoyance was in her head again. That was easy to deal with, just a swat from one of the thick tentacles she walked on. It avoided her blow and entered the portal, so she struck, reaching forward to easily swat the thing. Something wasn’t right. The portal was growing and as she’d crushed the annoyance, it had exploded.....Releasing something that was making her feel unwell.

“Enter the portal.....You must enter the portal.” Shouted Wiremi.

Trying to crush him put her off balance, though she was sure her blow had hit him. Then the vampires joined in the fight, of course they did. Why wouldn’t they all simply go away, or at least keep still so she could destroy them. The Unnamed lost her balance while trying to stamp on.....Clara. Another name had arrived in her head, a memory unwanted and unbidden. No use, she was so far off balance.....She fell into the portal and there was the sensation of falling.

“You can’t harm me.” She yelled. “Not now.....Nothing can harm me.”

The air smelled so good, almost intoxicating. The scent of jasmine, mixed with something else....Her hands were changing, becoming human fingers again. She was falling out of a blue sky and below her, a long way below her, was a forest.

“You haven’t won Seer, I can escape from your realm.”

As she felt the anger subside and the desire to escape from the realm of dreams. She looked at her hands and they were human hands, as were her bare feet and legs. She was naked...The thought worried her, she actually cared that she was naked. What would Brendan think of her.....His name triggered something as she fell, a whole lifetime of memories. She was still the Unnamed and always would be, but first and foremost she was human.

“I am Liz Grant.” She yelled.

She was falling fast towards the largest, tallest tree in a forest that seemed to cover the entire world below.

“I am Liz Grant.....I am Liz Grant.” She yelled.

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Laura had already had the conversation with Tim, in private. The one about a need to be merciless in battle and not leaving any of Yosef's people alive to tell the tale. A no loose ends talk that included the hard truth that they weren't the good guys on a mission of mercy. Good guys, bad guys....Laura remembered having a lot of conflicting thoughts about such things during the first few months after being turned by Simon.

In her mind she was now a vampire and feeding on human blood was a necessity to survive. Good and bad had become meaningless concepts. She hadn't expected Tim to totally agree with that idea, but she was sure he'd fight hard and show no restraint when the time came. He was essential to their plan, the only one of them who could touch the Chains of Patmos. If anything Akiva's reaction to touching the chains was greater than hers, they had no idea why.

"We can get you in the right place and keep him occupied." She'd told Tim. "But it will be up to you to get the chains on him."

"I can do it Laura. I won't let you down."

She was sure he'd try his best. He was a human though with no super strength or augmented DNA. She was afraid Tim might die and that was a very troubling thought.

"Wow.....That's a lot of heavy stuff to carry." Said Tim.

All three of them were in their suite at the St Regis Hotel. The table, chairs, bed and even parts of the floor were covered in their weapons and equipment. Any random police raid would think Christmas had come early.

"It looks a lot spread out." Said Akiva. "Once it's all in a backpack or carried on shoulder straps, it won't seem half as much to carry."

"And Akiva and I are pretty strong." Said Laura. "You'll need a main weapon and a backup Tim, a knife too. Otherwise the only thing you'll need to carry is a backpack with the chain in it."

"The chain neither of you can touch." Said Tim.

He'd said it to put them in their place a little and she didn't blame him. It couldn't be easy being the only human warrior fighting alongside a vampire and a....Whatever the hell Akiva was. She still wasn't sure if there was a word to describe a human mutation with extensively modified DNA. Akiva slapped Tim on the back.

"You're the guy with the chain Tim. Without that we're fucked." Said Akiva.

"Yeah.....No pressure." Added Laura.

The mess in the room vanished as everything went into backpacks. They were all carrying at least three weapons, which had all been spread out over the bed. Tim had an assault rifle on a sling over his shoulder, a wicked looking dagger and the scimitar he'd chosen from the Weapons of the Fallen. He was showing a tendency to prefer the rifle, which she could understand.

"The weapons of the fallen must be our primary weapon." She said. "We have no idea what type of creatures Yosef may be using as his guards and some of them aren't likely to be human. The only weapon you can rely on to hurt them is the blade you're carrying.....Yes, I am looking at you Tim."

"The fight will be messy Tim." Said Akiva. "In this battle though, the best way is to get up close and personal."

Akiva had chosen a battle axe that he could swing around with ease. As if to illustrate his point, he took a few practise swings.

"I get it, I really do." Said Tim. "I mustn't be squeamish about things getting a bit bloody. I won't be....I just might surprise you both."

"That's the spirit." Said Akiva.

Laura herself had a heavy mace, which had a gold tinge to the metal. A brutal weapon that gave her a bit of a buzz every time she practiced with it. She was really hoping to give it a lot of use in the coming battle. She also had two automatic handguns in holsters, one either side. She handed Akiva a gun, which he tucked down the back of his trousers. A silly place to put it, far too easy to shoot yourself in the backside.

"Twenty four rounds Tim. If you need any more ammo than that, you've been spraying the room." She handed Tim the gun and cringed when he too, tucked it down the back of his belt. They did have a lot to carry though and he obviously believed what he saw characters do on TV.

"Are you both ready?" She asked. "If you forgot anything, there's no coming back for it."

"I'm fine....Ready to go." Said Akiva.

Tim slapped his pockets to make sure the canisters were still there. Small but essential once they got to the forest in Poland. She'd have been disappointed if he hadn't checked.

"Me too....Let's get it done." Said Tim.

Laura did her own mental check, just to make sure she had everything. She then held them both and felt them hold tightly onto her. There was a chance Horus might divert her for a last minute pep talk, but he didn't. She pictured it in her mind, the front of the store on the other side of the road from the rug emporium. Quite quickly her mental image became the real thing. No time to stand about, even if it was the middle of the night. That part of Amman didn't have many places open at three in the morning, though there was always the chance of a passing car noticing three people who were armed to the teeth.

"Come on, we need to get inside." Said Laura.

Across the road and past the main doors of the rug emporium. Laura knew where the junction box was for the telephones, the green box against a wall wasn't even properly locked. The others kept in the shadows as she used a standard square key that would probably open half the telecoms boxes in the world. Yosef had probably paid the alarms people a fortune to install the interior and exterior CCTV. It was a good system, most of the cameras were pretty hard to spot. They'd been lazy though, using the existing junction box installed by the phone company. Why not, there was plenty of room in it and who would think of opening it to cut a few wires, or install a circuit board of their own. Laura had to take her gloves off to install the board, which meant being very focused and careful. After adjusting the CCTV in their favour, she closed and locked the box.

"Alright.....They won't see us coming." She said.

It happened all the time with commercial buildings. All the fancy security ended up around the front, so that anyone who mattered could see what they were getting for their money. Round the back was different, no one who mattered was likely to use the back door, or look at the various goods entrances and rubbish shoots. There was actually a pretty bad smell near the large communal bins.

"I bet Yosef has never set foot here, not even once." She muttered. "There....The hinged flap."

She'd done a thorough examination of the building of course, once accompanied by Akiva and two on her own. She knew someone had put two new contact switches on the back door and a hidden CCTV camera above it. The camera had been taken care of and would now be showing a repeating loop of the last fifteen minutes. There was no need to bother with the large and very solid looking door though, there was rug flap. Probably installed to pass rugs through that needed to be loaded into van's, its use wasn't important. Only one contact switch and the steel flap might have looked impressive once, but not after years of rain and corrosion had done their work. Bolts on the bottom on the inside, or at least it felt like that when she'd rattled it a bit one night. There were even two large metal handles to make it easier for her and Akiva to pull it open. Not until after that old and

fairly worn contact alarm had been dealt with. There was a sound in the street, so she pointed at the top of the flap, her guys would get the idea. Hard to do on modern contacts, she simply connected both sides with a long piece of wire. A long curly black wire, it would be almost invisible in the dark. "Now.....We pull." She muttered.

Akiva on one handle with her pulling the other. Lots of wear and corrosion had weakened the bolts and the flap to a point where it simply couldn't resist the strength of a vampire and Akiva. There was a loud cracking noise, though hopefully the sound wouldn't carry far. She held the flap up and nodded at Akiva and Tim, who quickly entered the building. Akiva then held the flap up so she could get inside. Risky making more noise, but a bit of tugging and pulling put the flap and its bolts back in place.

"Good as new." She muttered.

She'd been right, it was a rug flap. They were in a goods out room, the walls lined with shelves full of rugs and rolls of carpet. There was a certain smell about rugs which she found pleasant and reassuring. Maybe it was an omen, the double doors leading into the front of the premises weren't even locked. They were inside Yosef's domain.

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Clara had the mighty Viking war axe in her hands, expecting to have the fight of her life. Instead she'd watched as Jack exploded in a starburst of vivid colours, as the Unnamed One fell through a portal. It was all so confusing and unexpected that she didn't know if there side had won or lost. The hounds were still with her though, which was something. And Mabina.....She'd noticed something broken and twisted that was lying in the road.

"Oh shit, it's that Wiremi, the seer Laura is always talking about." Said Clara. "Liz was shouting at him about something. He really seemed to have pissed her off."

"Dead.....She killed him, he looks almost cut in two." Said Mabina.

"Do you think it worked ?" Asked Clara. "Can we go home now ?"

They needed Liz to get home and she'd vanished into a portal to.....Clara had no idea where, though the waft of fresh air had felt good. She walked up to the twenty first gateway to the underworld and it was still glowing.

"This is probably our only way out." She said.

"We should wait for Liz before trying anything drastic." Said Mabina.

"Listen to your friend. There is no way out that way, not for anyone and definitely not for your kind." The minions of Huh were many, forming a line near where Mabina was still examining the body of Wiremi the Seer. All of them were female, all dressed in identical robes. One of the minions moved forward.

"Don't be concerned about that one, arrangements have been made."

"Did we do it, did we win ?" Asked Clara.

"The gates to Duat are sealed again. So yes, it could be said that you won. Your friend is in the realm of dreams and should be herself again fairly soon.....As for two vampires standing at the gate to the underworld..... Where do you wish to go ?"

"Home." Said Clara. "What about the hounds though ?"

The minion of Huh was silent for a moment, probably thinking it over or mentally consulting someone further up the chain of command.

"They are yours, given to you by a grateful God. They will remain here, but you can call them and they will answer your commands. Send them away and they will return to the underworld. Now....I will send you home."

She never even touched them. One moment they were standing on the road of the pharaohs. The next they were stood in the hallway of the house in Hornsey.

"Ahh....I would have preferred going to my home." Said Mabina.

"I can call you an Uber." Said Clara. "Fist though....I'd die for some Thai food and a bottle of prosecco. How about I order us some and tell you all about what happened to Simon. I have to tell someone, or.....My head might explode."

"Has he gone away for a while ?"

"He's gone forever Mabina....That's it, I'll never see him again, unless we meet up in the underworld."

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Gwen Logan was asleep, lying in the bed she shared with Daniel. Sleep hadn't come easy, it couldn't be that far off dawn. Jack was the problem, the cause of the anxiety that wasn't content with ruining her waking life. Deep into a dream about the pigs of all things, one had been talking to her in perfect English, begging her not to be sent to the abattoir. She was used to such dreams, she always did get far too close to their livestock. When the pig's face turned into Jack's....

"We need to talk mum."

Could she talk in a dream ? Gwen never had before and didn't know how. She followed Jack as he walked across a lawn of bright pink grass. Her son seemed to be wearing robes, bright turquoise robes. There was a smell too, an odour she'd been getting a vague whiff of, all over their small holding. Jasmine, her son smelt of Jasmine, or at least something did.

"Not far now mum.....Stay with me and.....Don't wake up."

Another weird thing to say in a dream, could anyone wake up at will ? She was certain she couldn't. Gwen followed her son through an orchard with trees full of purple apples. Still they moved on, until they came to more pink grass and houses that looked like huge mushrooms, dayglow yellow mushrooms.

"Follow me..... Step inside and..... You'll see."

A gap opened in the side of a mushroom house and Gwen stepped inside. It was as if the dream had stopped to be replaced by a kind of reality. She was inside some sort of round house with walls covered in tapestries.

"My style will be different to Wiremi's; it has to be....I intend to be true to myself."

Jack was stood there, once more looking like her son. No vivid colours, though he was still wearing robes. Beige robes that actually seemed to suit him. Gwen hugged him so hard that for a moment, she stopped him from talking.

"Oh Jack..... You're alright." She said.

"Yes mum I'm fine. Wiremi the Seer saved my life and sadly he died in the process. I owe him a lot and as I think he guessed, it is my destiny to replace him."

None of it should have made sense, but in a weird way it did. She'd always known Jack was special in the old meaning of the word. She let him go and followed him to where a large circular carpet had been placed on the ground. He sat cross legged and she did likewise, even though her knee joints complained a little.

"I was dreaming.....Is all this real ?" She asked.

"As real as anything is. I learned something here a long time ago....Reality can be more fluid than most people think."

Her son opened the fingers of her left hand and dropped a single yellow flower into her upturned palm. The tiny perfect bloom melted like wax, before being absorbed into her skin.

“You can now visit me in your dreams, whenever you wish.”

“So you’re not coming home ?”

“This is my home now and there are important duties for me here. I loved Wiremi.....Yet. He was in denial about so many things that should have been dealt with far sooner. From time to time though, I will come and visit you in your world.”

“But.....The farm is your world.” She said.

“Not any more, though I’ll always be your son. Come with me, you must see the great tree and sit for a while beside the fire. I have so much to tell you.....”

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Laura had noticed it before, the way her mind could become fixated on trivia during a battle. Not to the point of spoiling her speed and focus, though it felt a little weird. They’d made it right through the public area of the rug emporium before being attacked, well past all the expensive rugs and Middle Eastern style lighting. As she used the mace to crush a guard’s skull, she felt ridiculously pleased that none of his blood would stain any of the rugs. Yes there were cleaners arriving who were the best at what they did, but would they be able to get blood out of handmade rugs ? It seemed unlikely.

“I suppose they could burn them all.” She muttered. “Though that would be such a waste.”

“Sorry....I missed that.” Shouted Akiva.

“Nothing important.”

Just her going quietly crazy. Probably OCD, or maybe a coping mechanism to deal with.....Fuck it.

Laura used the wonderful mace, a Weapon of the Fallen, to shatter the guard’s skull completely. A waste of course, his heart would have stopped and his blood would be undrinkable. She had briefly fed on another of Yosef’s guards, but there was no pleasure in feeding quickly while in the heat of battle. Like sex, feeding on human blood couldn’t be hurried if you really wanted to enjoy it. Tim yelling brought her out of the shallow day dream.

“Use the blade Tim, it’s a vampire.” She yelled.

Not that the blade would definitely kill the female vampire, but it would do more good than the nine millimetre bullets Tim was firing into her stomach. Laura had gone over it with him so many times.....

“Oh....Yes Tim, that will work too.” She yelled.

“See....I can get the job done.”

Yes he could, she was suddenly very proud of him. Tim had raised the gun and put two bullets into the head of the vampire. Her kind were tough, but destroy the heart or scramble the brain and they died, the permanent kind of death. Mabina had survived a bullet in the brain once, though only with the help of whatever dark deity watched over vampires. And of course the lingering life force in several thousand bodies buried under the dirt floor in her cellar.

“Step it up guys.” She yelled. “We have to be finished before the clean-up crew arrives.”

“Alright, I’ll head up to the top floor.” Said Akiva. “How are your wounds ?”

“Stinging like crazy, but I’ll live.” She said. “Go on, get Tim in position to use the chains.”

Tim was essential and she was rather fond of him. Laura had put herself between Tim and a guard with some sort of automatic weapon. She’d been hit twice before killing the guy. Both bullets were in her side somewhere, maybe in a kidney. She’d probably survive, vampires usually survived such wounds, though the bullets would sting like hell until they were dug out. There was also the chance one might shift and open an artery. Even that might not kill her, though the blood loss would really slow her down. Akiva had a few minor cuts and Tim just had a bruised cheek. Out of all of them she’d suffered most, which she found quite embarrassing.

Akiva and Tim ran up the stairs, leaving her to secure the floor. Laura couldn't sense any living humans, just one vampire, a large one judging by the way they were pinging her senses. Yosef had to be a bit special, vampires rarely worked as guards for anyone and yet she'd sensed three of them in the building.

"You !" She shouted. "Tell me your name before I kill you ?"

"Fuck you."

He was big and stupid looking, the sort of vampire that made her wonder why another of her kind had gone through all the hard work of turning him. It wasn't as if stupid people were in short supply and needed to be given immortality. He moved slowly, favouring his left leg.

"Looks like you caught a bullet or two." She said.

"As have you girl, as have you."

The male vampire had a machete in his hand, as he moved towards her. Laura would have enjoyed squaring off for an epic battle, vampire with machete fights vampire with mace. There wasn't time though, there were only so many minutes before dawn and the arrival of the cleaners. She pulled one her much loved Glocks out of its holster.

"Sorry." She said.

She aimed at his forehead, before moving her aim down. He was a vampire, one of her kind and he deserved better than a couple of bullets to the head. She fired twice, aiming at his knees. As he yelled out in pain and began to fall, she used all her strength to hit him over the back of the head with her mace. The weapon was a bit low tech, but as a device to crush skulls and make the floor wet with brains, it would take some beating.

"Damn, I didn't need another wound." She muttered.

He'd moved fast for a big guy with a few bullets in him, faster than she'd expected. Dead now of course, most of his head was staining the floor tiles crimson red. He'd nicked her with the machete though, a deep gouge through her jacket and into her right forearm. Nothing that would slow her down.....But damn, Akiva would tease her about it until hell froze over.

"Here we go....." She muttered.

The sound of gunfire was coming from the floors above. Strangely the police investigating the gunfire was the least of their worries. The outside of the building looked normal, all the doors secure. Eventually the local cops would give the area a look over, but they were likely to ignore the building completely. They'd probably raid the shop at the end of the block, the one with a history of dealing in drugs and stolen phones. Laura gripped the mace and ran up the stairs to join the fighting.

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There were a few steps to climb from the pavement to the front door. On every step Patsy was wondering whether to use her key or ring the bell. Clara had invited her to come to the house for wine and pizza, plus the chance to talk about Simon disappearing. There was the question of her almost moving in while Clara was away. If some kind of punishment was waiting for her, there didn't seem a good way to avoid it. She really wanted, no needed, to know what had happened to Simon. Plus if Clara wanted to hurt her, she knew where she lived.

"Face it Patsy, get it over and done with." She muttered.

She used her key to open the door, to be greeted by the wonderful smell of fresh brewed coffee. In the lounge the flat screen was showing athletics with the sound down.

"Clara....I let myself in. It's Patsy."

"In the kitchen."

Clara smiled at her, which was a relief, even if it might indicate nothing at all. Her hair had been cut very short by someone with little skill at hairdressing, though Patsy decided not to mention it.

"I know I said pizza and wine, but it can be Biryani and beer if you like Patsy ? Your choice, I haven't ordered anything yet."

"Pizza sounds fine, I haven't had any in ages."

Patsy helped herself to coffee while Clara ordered pizza and a few extras, while mildly flirting with the guy at the pizza place.

"There....On its way." Said Clara.

"Did you notice the extra rooms ?"

"Extra rooms ? Ah, that must be what the minions of Huh were talking about. The entry to the past has gone now Patsy, gone forever, never to return."

"Oh.....That's a pity. And you....Did you and the others succeed in what you were doing ?"

"Yes we did, we're all heroes, though I don't expect anyone will ever put up a statue of us anywhere."

It was all important of course, all of it mattered. But Liz's destiny to become a guardian of the underworld, Clara's hair and even the extra rooms that had vanished. It was all small talk leading up to what really mattered to her. Where the hell was Simon Atherton ?

"And Laura, have you any news about Laura ?" Asked Patsy.

"No, not recently. She'll turn up with a grin on her face and not a scratch on her, you know Laura."

"Yes, you're right, she's indestructible."

There was eye contact and they both knew where the conversation had to go next.

"He's not coming back Patsy, I'm sorry. There was a mistake made by someone called Brother Alberti. Well meant, but when Simon stepped back in time.....It created a paradox that had to be fixed."

Patsy hadn't meant to cry. She didn't shriek or make any noise, but she could feel her cheeks getting wet. Clara was quietly crying too. It had to be bad to make a vampire cry.

"Where is he Clara ?"

"He's back there with Giovanni and Niña, he's in their world now. He merged with the version of him that was alive then. Now there is just one Simon and he's living near Florence during the rule of the Medici.....I have to admit it Patsy. I'm not sure how I'm going to cope with losing him."

Patsy moved first, hugging Clara as they both wept. It was the first time that Patsy realised that as with Simon, Clara's skin felt cooler than that of a human.

"If there's anything I can do Clara..."

"Keep your key's you're still our friend. Laura will go crazy if we don't see you again."

"I will, I promise....We can still have our pizza and Netflix nights."

They wept and were still weeping when the delivery guy arrived. Patsy could feel the dampness of tears coming through her blouse.

"I'll go." She said.

"No, that's alright....I always give him a tip." Said Clara.

They both needed time in the bathroom to tidy up. When the pizza was on the kitchen table and a bottle of prosecco had been opened, they were almost back to their usual selves.

"Oh, this wine is so good." Said Patsy.

"Wine has become the universal pick me up. No matter what the problem, a glass of well chilled wine will make it seem less of a problem."

"Does Laura know about Simon ?"

"I think so, maybe....The minions weren't too clear about that."

"Who is this Huh ?" Asked Patsy.

"A God no less, the God of time, eternity and a lot of other things."

"That figures.....Now he's meddling with our lives, our time."

"No more tears Patsy, the pizza is great and looking at it from Simon's point of view, this might all be a good thing. He will now get a second chance to succeed in finding a great secret, the great secret. How many people get a second chance at anything ?"

"Very few Clara, probably hardly anyone."

The wine had been drunk a bit too quickly and even Clara seemed a bit the worse for it. Patsy was having to think about what she wanted to say, before saying it.

"Just because I've lived a long time doesn't mean I don't feel the bad times." Said Clara. "There are times when something is brought home to me and I feel every one of my five hundred and odd years of life. I call them Lavender Sweep moments. There haven't been many, but losing Simon because a stupid priest fucked up big time. That is definitely a Lavender Sweep moment."

"Why Lavender Sweep, what does it mean ?" Asked Patsy.

"It's a road in Battersea, right here in London. A sweeping semi-circle of a road that takes you close to the library, where I met.....Someone who meant something to me."

"Tell me about it Clara, you know I can keep a secret."

"Oh yes, you can keep a secret, I'll give you that. It was during the war, I was with Simon then, though as you're aware, we had our flings with other people. I can't remember why I was in the library. Probably looking something up, there was no Google then. No internet either now I come to think about it. She was there, Millicent, though everyone called her Millie."

Clara stopped and filled up both of their glasses, though Patsy didn't touch hers. She wanted to hear about Millie and how she'd managed to hurt Clara that badly.

"She was a nurse at the main hospital in Battersea, which has gone now. Everything goes Patsy, everything changes. That's the problem with immortality....Everything around you changes or dies, but you don't. I loved Millie in my own way. It nearly destroyed me when she died."

"Did she die of old age ?" Asked Patsy.

"No....No, it was the war that killed her, in a way. The blackout left everyone wandering about like the blind, sometimes finding their way by feeling their way along railings and garden walls. There were still cars on those roads, though officially only the emergency services should have been on those roads at night. A car hit her, the bastard didn't even stop. She was such a bright thing, a hyperactive ball of energy. Dead before her life really got going."

"You were lovers weren't you ?"

"Of course we were, though it took us weeks to work up the courage to even kiss. Things were different then. She lived on Lavender Sweep, the house is still there. I went back a few years ago, a kind of pilgrimage in honour of Millicent Nash. Everything changes, houses change hands, the roads seem to always get more lines painted on them. As for cars.....They can date a picture easier than just about anything else. The houses though, they're like me.....They can be around for a hundred years or more without changing at all. The house is still there, you can see right through from the front to the back garden, her back garden."

"I see it now Clara, I understand your Lavender Sweep moments."

Clara stood up and pulled her chair closer, before holding her hand.

"You are welcome here Patsy, I mean that. You did sleep with Simon in this house while I was away, I can smell you everywhere, including our bedroom."

"I never.....I mean we never....Not in your bed. I helped Simon look for something in your room, that's all." Said Patsy.

"Alright.....You still played house with Simon, something I did warn you about. I've no intention of seriously injuring you, but there must be some kind of punishment. You have to suffer a little Patsy, there has to be a reminder that your actions can lead to consequences."

Patsy felt genuine fear as Clara's fangs dropped. The vampire she thought of as a friend held her in a hug that felt just a little too tight.

"What are you going to do to me ?" She asked.

"Less than you deserve Patsy, less than you deserve."

First there was a gentle scratch as Clara's fang ran over her left cheek, which became a painful bite under her ear, quite close to her jaw. Within a second or so, she was unconscious.

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Laura ran past two bodies on the stairs, both the dead human minions of Yosef Khatib. She had to jump over one of them as his body stretched right across the stairs. She found Yosef's girlfriend in front of the open door to the top floor. Revna had a gun in her hand, though she was never going to use it again. Someone, probably Tim, had put at least two rounds into Revie's chest and she was close to death.

"He'll kill you....Yosef can't be beaten."

Blood oozed out of Revie's mouth as she talked. Laura was glad it hadn't been her who'd found Revie on the stairs, to her the woman was a non-combatant. She hadn't carried a gun out of malice, just out of a wish to protect the man she loved. She was alive though, her heart still managing a steady beat. Laura needed blood to heal her wounds and Revie would soon be dead from her wounds. Laura knelt next to her and shoved Revie's head to one side.

"There won't be much pain."

There would be some, there was no time for finesse. Laura bit deep into Revie's throat, slicing right through the major arteries. The blood came out in a torrent that soaked the front of her clothing. The blood didn't flow for long, just about enough for Laura to feel better than she had since being shot, a lot better. She looked at the mutilated body she was going to leave on the stairs.

"Thank you Revie."

Through the door at the top of the stairs and Laura didn't stop running until she saw Akiva aiming a gas canister at Yosef. The gas had been her idea after reading that someone had once successfully put Yosef to sleep with gas. True he'd killed most of his attackers when he woke up, but she had an idea about that too. Her pair of warriors were wearing gasmasks, which had to make fighting harder. Tim was trying to keep a female vampire at bay with his blade and a lot of swearing.

"Fucking bitch.....Come near me again and I'll slice your ears off."

Tim was limping, his trousers were red with blood which was probably his. After a brief glimpse had shown Laura the dead bodies and carnage in the room, she was surprised he'd survived. A happy surprise, but emotion had to be put aside until later. Akiva looked to be keeping Yosef busy, so she used her mace on the vampire. A good hard blow in the centre of her face. No challenge, no warning, only fools think a fight should be fair. As the vampire fell dead to the ground, the front of her brain oozing down her ruined face, Laura grabbed Tim.

"The chain, where is the chain ?"

"There."

He pointed at the bag, which wasn't that far away.

"Get it, we're ending this now." She said.

Akiva hadn't escaped without a few wounds that would probably leave scars, which made her feel less embarrassed about her own wounds. Bullet wounds in a vampire tended to mean you hadn't moved fast enough. Wounded or not Akiva had riddled Yosef with rounds from his assault rifle. The ancient vampire wasn't likely to die from the countless holes in his chest, but he was obviously a long way from being bulletproof. The holes in his chest were bleeding and he was breathing hard. How long had it been since he'd faced a tough opponent in battle ?

"So..... You bleed when shot." She yelled. "How much of your reputation is bullshit ?"

Good, she had his full attention. He was breathing hard, though she could still hold her breath, for some time if she needed to. She removed a gas canister from the inside pocket of her jacket and emptied it straight into his face. Up close, most of the gas had to be going deep into his lungs.

"You'll never beat me Laura, I'll....."

Yosef Khatib fell forward onto his knees. She grabbed his shoulder and slammed him face first into the floor, before kneeling on his shoulder blades.

"Now Tim, do it now.....We won't get another chance." She yelled.

"Crap.....I don't feel too good." Said Akiva.

She had to ignore him for now, their enemy wasn't likely to be caught by the gas twice. A lot of his reputation might have been embellished over the years, but he was strong and clever. As she knelt on Yosef, Tim locked the manacles on his wrists. Oh how Yosef squirmed as the metal bit his flesh. She could see the skin on his wrist melting away like candle wax. Tim hesitated.

"You promised Tim, no mercy....Fucking do it !" She yelled.

Once Tim began it took no time at all. The manacles went on his ankles, making it hard for Yosef to stand, let alone fight them. He began to howl though, the noise was incredible.

"Get away from him Tim, he's mine to deal with now. Look after Akiva and get a clean shirt on in case the cops bang on the door."

"I know.....We have no idea where the gunfire might be coming from."

She grabbed on tightly to Yosef and accidentally touched the chain while pressing the metal disc under her skin. The pain was incredible and she felt drained and so tired. Laura took him to the bunker under the forest in Poland. As she pushed him against the cell wall, her hand touched the damned chain again, the links seemed to be everywhere. Still in pain she moved herself to the corridor outside the cell. Laura sat on the floor and listened to Yosef throwing himself against the heavy metal door.

"Oh, I'm so tired." She muttered.

"When I get out of here, you're going to die. Though not until after I've killed everyone you care about." Shouted Yosef.

"Good luck with that Yosef. The Nazis were good at building things strong and to last."

She was tired and the chain had burned her arm quite badly. Yosef was going nowhere and she'd earned a short nap. Laura leant against the wall and went to sleep.

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Patsy woke up feeling stiff, sore and a little nauseous. There was light coming from a window to her left, a very grubby window with scratched glass. She carefully touched her neck and her finger came away with a little congealed blood on the tip.

"Oh shit Clara, where the hell have you dumped me ?" She muttered.

It took a few minutes for the feeling of nausea to go away, a few minutes to look over the interior of the garden shed. Surrounding her was the junk usually found in garden sheds, there was even a lawn mower just to her right. Patsy had been left sitting in a deck chair and she was naked. Actually not

quite naked, she was wearing a nice pair of flip-flops. That was odd, as she didn't own a pair of flip-flops. Naked, but at least Clara had covered her with an extremely grubby bath towel, which looked like the owner of the shed used it to wipe down the mower.

"Oh Fuck.....I need to pee."

A quick look around showed a red plastic bucket in amongst some canes, the sort her mum used to tie up the lupins. As Patsy stood up she saw the note on the floor. A note written in Clara's best old fashioned copperplate writing. The note could wait, she left it where it was and squatted over the bucket. It took a while for her bladder to empty and she felt better.

"Nothing makes you feel more anxious than an overfull bladder." She mumbled.

Patsy picked up the note and looked through the grubby window. There was a garden fence too high to see over, with some high bushes the other side of it. She looked on the bright side. She was probably still in London, probably only a short Uber ride from home, once she found her phone. Alright she had no clothes, but at least it was a sunny warm day outside. The sound of kids playing burst her happiness bubble a little.

"Crap.... How much of me will this towel cover?"

It just about covered the area between her legs that might get her into trouble, with enough left over to tie a knot in it at the front. Patsy sat in the deck chair and read the note.

'Patsy, you're in Lavender Sweep. In the garden of her house, Millicent's house.

We're even now, no grudges still held, none at all.

Please come around for wine and Thai food on Friday.

Your bag, clothes phone.....All your things are hanging on the tree at the end of the garden.

It is a very long garden, though you might be able to run to the tree without being seen.

If you run very, very, very quickly.

Lots of love – Clara.'

"Fucking psycho bitch." Patsy yelled.

She then laughed and carried on laughing for quite a while. As punishments went it could have been worse, though the wound in neck felt as though it would hurt for a while. The punishment fitted the crime though, Patsy accepted that. And of course, she would go for Thai food on Friday.

"Ok, let's get this over with."

She opened the shed door a little and looked out. Good, no one right outside who might yell and run off to call the cops. That had once happened when she was at college, during rag week....Never again. She fully opened the door and quickly worked out where the gravel path went and the best way to cover the distance to the fence at the end, while wearing flip-flops. It did seem to be a hell of a long garden.

Patsy took off at a full sprint. She was young, fit and she had been a sprinter at school athletics. She ignored everything to her right and left, just keeping her eyes on the path. She refused to let the gasp to her left distract her.

"Margaret.....Margaret.....Did you see....."

She reached the tree quickly, despite a pebble wedging itself into one of the flip-flops. Everything she'd worn the night before was there, hanging from the tree. The young boy looking over the fence was just an unwanted annoyance.

"Hey you jerk, turn around while I dress." She shouted.

"Sorry."

He looked about fifteen, an age when boys tended to become very annoying, but at least he did turn around when asked.

“Am I in Battersea ?” She asked. “Lavender Sweep I think.”

“Yes, you’re in the garden of number fifty three.”

Once she was dressed she told him he could look around again. It was time for her to smile and hope he’d forgotten about her calling him a jerk.

“A friend played a prank on me.” She said. “If I clamber over the fence into your garden, can I go through your house to get out into the street ?”

“Yes of course you can.”

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It was dark and the air smelled quite musty. Laura had no idea how long she’d been asleep for, though it felt as though it had been quite a while. At least Yosef wasn’t shouting or bashing around in the cell. She’d found the old wartime bunker by accident, while using the Egg to investigate such places. It was when she was looking for a new lair, somewhere really secure. She doubted if anyone had been in the Nazi bunkers since the war, the top two floors were just a mass of wrecked concrete and it was impossible to get down from the surface. Air quality had put her off using it; there was little fresh air, though there was a slight breeze coming from somewhere. In the end the bodies in the bottom floor had put her off the idea of using the place. Mainly dry bones now, but sharing a home with at least a dozen dead soldiers was a little too creepy, even for her.

“Are you awake Yosef ?” She shouted.

He must have used his shoulder on the door, the thud was quite loud. No screaming, just several more loud thuds as he tried to break through the door.

“You’ll just hurt yourself....Wartime German engineering, you’ll never break that door.”

Laura felt in the dark for one of the flashlights she’d left in the corridor and closed her eyes as she turned it on. Gradually she opened her eyes until the light no longer hurt her eyes. There were gas canisters there too, enough to knock Yosef out several times, if the need arose. The inspection flap in the door opened by being slid to one side. He was right in the middle of the room, glaring at her.

“How are you doing Yosef ?” She asked. “Have the chains burned through to the bone yet ?”

“They won’t kill me.....Nothing you can do will kill me.”

He was quivering with a mixture of rage and pain, the flashlight showed pools of blood on the floor where he’d been struggling against the chains, and failed.

“You were supposed to be bullet proof.....You’ll die, though I didn’t put the chain on you to kill you. I need a piece of information from you....A name I’m told that only you know.”

He ran at the door, thrusting his face right into the small inspection hole. Laura involuntarily leapt back and cursed herself for doing so.

“Sorry child, did I scare you ?” He asked. “Tell me about this name you want from me ?”

She had him in chains in a cell, which was inside an impregnable bunker. The time for verbal sparring was over and the time for asking straight questions had arrived.

“I’m told you know the true name of Samnuha.”

“Who told you that ?”

It seemed a particularly cheesy cliché considering their location, but she had to say it.

“I’m the one asking the questions Yosef. Tell me the name and I’ll remove the chains.”

“And you’ll let me leave this place ?” He asked.

“I didn’t say that.”

There was a look in his eyes, he knew she intended to kill him. Would he really care that much about his own death after such an incredibly long life ? He hadn't even asked her if Revie was alive or dead. Out of nowhere he seemed to find something amusing to laugh about. Yosef Khatib laughed like a crazy man for a while and she let him get it out of his system.

"What is your full name Laura, the one they used at your christening ?"

"I told you.....You don't ask the questions."

"Tell me, it is important. Trust me in this one thing Laura. I need to know your full given name to tell you a name."

"Very well, I was christened Laura June Selway."

"Then listen to me, for I will tell you a truth that I am the last living thing to know. The true name of Samnuha, who was once worshipped as a human God, is..... Laura June Selway."

"Yes, very funny.....I....."

She could see him without the flashlight, she could see the entire cell as though it was in full daylight. She could even see the worms in the soil just the other side of the cell wall. Laura leant back against the grubby corridor wall and felt....So much happening inside her, so much changing. Horus had told her she'd know if Yosef told her the right name. It was obvious that Horus must have suspected who or what she was. Yosef was still smiling at her, still talking.

"It started with a God of course, a real God with huge amounts of power, as these things often do. Q'uq'umatz who is credited with creating the world, a feathered serpent God of the peoples who inhabited South America. Usually mentioned as a God of the Aztecs, but he had been around for longer than that, much longer."

"I know about him, I looked him up after a dream." She said. "I think....It sounds crazy, but I think I was swallowed by him in another life, or one of my kind was eaten by him."

"Our kind Laura, we're both creatures who live by feeding on human blood. Gods are strange beings and being eaten by one often doesn't mean being digested. Q'uq'umatz ate the vampire girl, that is known about and depicted on ancient carvings, if you know where to look. What isn't certain, though it is rumoured about....Is that something very strange happened, very strange indeed." Changes in her body were causing her pain, Laura had no patience for a long and rambling tale.

"Do you want those chains to come off Yosef ? Get to the point of your story."

"I am the last to know the truth Laura, the last to see a living human child fathered by Q'uq'umatz. After that child the part that was a God became watered down with every generations, but I saw that child and I know she really existed. I can guess at what's happening to you, if you'd like to hear an old vampire ramble a little ?"

"Alright..... Tell me Yosef ?"

"For generations the girls of that original line of descent have been a bit special. Long lives, very long lives. Strength too, far stronger than a normal human. Nothing more than that though and always the girls. A few stories about a woman in a village reaching an immense age reached the outside world, though no one believed them. Somewhere along a very long line of kinship, you turned up Laura June Selway. Destined to live an unnaturally long life and be stronger than most, but then you were turned into a vampire. Some connection was made, something hidden in the cells of your body woke up."

"And waking up in a bad mood.....The pain is quite bad." She said. "Who the hell was Samnuha though, the original ? Was she the first girl child of Q'uq'umatz ?"

"Exactly.....I knew you were clever. Release me and I'll help you fully understand your past and perhaps your future too."

"I can't do that Yosef. Even if I could I wouldn't, the world has suffered your existence for far too long already. You didn't even ask me about Revie."

"Is she dead?"

"Yes."

"Come on Laura, we're the same you and I. Revie had served her purpose."

Lots of things had made her angry that day, his attitude to the death of Revie was just the final straw. Tim being hurt, Akiva with wounds there wasn't time for her to even look at. All to satisfy the weird curiosity of an eccentric ancient God. Unfair really, Yosef wasn't the cause of most of her anger, but he was there. She didn't even gas him and use a pair of heavy gloves to remove the chains. That had been the plan, she just didn't want to take that long over killing him. Plus of course the chains would add extra weight, extra momentum when he fell. Laura used the Egg to enter his cell and shoved him against the wall. She'd changed, she was now far stronger than him. Even touching the chains no longer hurt her, or at least not that much.

"It's time Yosef.....Time for you to die."

"You can't kill me Laura."

"Yes I can....In a very unique way."

He was struggling, so she grabbed the chains that bound his wrists. First she used the Egg to take him to a valley in Afghanistan, a barren valley in a place that really deserved to be called the middle of nowhere. Laura had already dug a deep hole, a good fifteen feet down into the stony soil. The tools she'd used to dig it were leaning on the only tree in the area.

"Your grave Yosef Khatib."

"Burying me alive won't kill me.....Eventually I'll claw my way out."

They weren't there to enjoy the view, she grabbed him and moved them both to the top of the first cloud she saw. Not high enough, she looked at a small wispy cloud high above her and moved them there. Care was needed, she was far from an expert on the atmosphere, but she knew that once the air became too thin, she'd have trouble breathing. Three more times she found a slight wisp of a tiny cloud and moved them higher.

"We're there.....You can't survive the fall from here, no one could, not even you."

"Drop me and you'll never know your past. I am the last left who knows the truth."

"You're a fool, I don't need to drop you. I can't fly Yosef, we're both already falling."

No more listening to his weasel words, or bizarre claims about knowing her destiny. Laura used the Egg to return to the tree where she'd left the spade, pick axe and shovel. It seemed to take a long time for Yosef to hit the ground and he was a good fifty feet from the grave she'd dug for him.

Perhaps it was just out of cussedness, but there was a slight flicker of life in him.

"It's over Yosef....Let go.....Go to sleep."

Vampires are good at knowing if someone is dead or alive. She knew the exact moment Yosef died. She might well have killed the oldest living creature on the planet, though she had no regrets. It took her several hours to fill the hole in the ground where Yosef was to rest for eternity. His body might rest, but she thought his soul was probably heading for the darkest part of the underworld. The chains were left on him, on the slight chance she might need them again one day. She was unlikely to forget where they were.

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Akiva healed fast and he hadn't wanted to get in the way while they enjoyed an extended holiday in Amman. He was still limping a bit as they waved to him as he left in a taxi for the airport. Akiva was tough though, she had no doubt he'd fully recover from his wounds.

Laura hadn't immediately gone to see Horus, she had no idea why she'd chosen to put it off. Tim and her were two weeks into an extended holiday in Amman, when the message came up on her phone. "Nathalie Aurigny just reminding me I have a job." She said. "I'm cordially invited to turn up for work next Monday at nine."

"It has been a great holiday." Said Tim. "Leaving aside the blood and carnage of course."

"Tonight I'll go and see Horus."

"Tell him you're finished now, no more odd jobs."

"He's a God Tim. Rudeness could get me turned into something unnatural."

Laura didn't even change, though she did change her hotel slippers for trainers. While Tim watched a movie, she concentrated on Horus and used the Egg. No being sent to weird locations, she was in his throne room, where reality often seemed a little....Tenuous. He waved her forward and a chair appeared, close enough so that her knees touched his.

"I was right, you're different Laura." He said. "Even I couldn't be sure, the serpent God hid the knowledge of his child and he hid it well."

"Yosef Khatib is dead." She said.

"I know, I felt him leave the world of the living. Our little Quid Pro Quo is finished Laura and I am in the mood to bestow a few gifts. I am rarely in such a mood, so make the most of it. Tell me Laura....What presents would you like....Be bold ask me for anything."

"Can I have the knowledge you have about the original Samnuha and the children that are descended from her?"

"Easily done, you can have my memories, though they aren't that detailed. Samnuha was treated as a human God by her people, which rarely creates a balanced individual. Some of the memories are unpleasant.... Many called her the destroyer. Do you still want those memories?"

"Yes, I do."

He didn't move, his bird like eyes didn't even blink. The memories were in her head though, even if many of them showed Samnuha to be a brutal ancestor.

"One more gift Laura."

"I would like to see Simon again, if that's possible?"

"Even I am wary of upsetting Huh. You and Simon are now effectively living in different worlds, separated by a barrier of time, eight hundred years of time. I can see a way those worlds could collide. Briefly of course and there couldn't be much interaction. Maybe just enough of a collision so you could see each other, very briefly. Would you like that?"

"Yes please, that would be greatly appreciated."

"It is done."

Nothing happened, she didn't feel any different, but she probably wasn't supposed to. Horus hadn't finished though, he actually touched her hand with his.

"Now Laura, you once mentioned having a few questions for me. Do you still want to ask those questions?"

"Yes, I do."

"Very well, but not the usual where did I come from, why am I here and where do I go. Nothing predictable Laura, be imaginative and I will truthfully answer three questions."

"About anything?" She asked.

"Yes, about anything."

"I've always wondered....."

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~ The End ~

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What ? Did you really expect to hear the wisdom of an Ancient God ? Of course there will be a fourth vampire book, though it might not start until next year. About half Simon in Italy during the rule of the Medici, and half in the twenty first century, though those worlds just might collide a few times.