

Quid Pro Quo

(Season three of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 3 – A Bored Jinn

“Simon was getting better at flying, though he still hated it. He’d heard all the usual statistics, how flying was the safest form of travel. His favourite way to get about had been by horse and cart, and you never heard about one of those ending up as a burning wreck on a hillside.”

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Laura was pleased they’d spent the night in the staff accommodation, rather than her room in Hornsey. His room was dirty, cramped and downright squalid, but it meant an extra hour and a half before they had to get up. It was his room, his territory, his home ground. Tim would feel more secure on his own turf and that was important too. She’d decided to ask him to leave the hotel, to join her in travelling the path less travelled, sometime the path rarely travelled at all. There was even an excuse building in her mind, a way of explaining the secrecy of her mission in the Middle East, without telling him she was a vampire. A vampire on a mission.....It sounded crazy when she thought about it.

“I’m seeing the witch in HR at ten.” She said. “It’s time we had our chat about me leaving.”

Both naked, that time in the morning was usually used for sex. There was nothing quite like early morning sexual intercourse for getting the day off to a good start. Nothing quite like a freshly fucked glow to make even the most boring morning, seem a hell of a lot better.

“I thought you liked the woman in HR now ?” Asked Tim.

“Actually she’s been really good, but Clara and I have always thought of her as a bit of a monster. It’s too late to change direction now.”

“So it’s definite, you’re really going ?” He asked.

“Yes, Jerusalem first and then Egypt. Simon and Clara are going to Jerusalem and I’m meeting them there in a couple of days. After that.....Who knows. I might be gone for a few months or a few years.”

“It all seems a bit sudden.” He said. “Are you keeping the house in Hornsey ?”

“Yes, we’ve arranged for someone to keep an eye on it.”

He had to ask the question. Laura knew that was important, she couldn’t ask him to go with her, unless he pushed the conversation that way. It wasn’t as if they were engaged or anything, it always had been just a bit of really good sex between two consenting adults. Though she would miss him if he didn’t ask the question.

“It’s just that.....I don’t want it to be over Laura. If we’d had a row or something, but everything feels so good at the moment. You haven’t even told me why you’re going abroad.”

Good, he’d given her the chance to say her piece. Laura just hoped he didn’t laugh at her or call the police.

“Can you keep a secret ?” She asked him. “Can you keep a really big secret ?”

“Of course I can.....I even had the secret keeping badge when I was in the Boy Scouts.”

“Idiot.”

She rolled onto him, digging her elbows into his chest, then her nails went into his skin. Nothing too painful, but enough to get him squirming.

“Ow.... Stop it Laura.....Yes, I can keep a secret.”

"We're dealers in rare and sought after artefacts." She told him. "People know museums were looted during the Iraq war, but it goes on all the time. Mix priceless historical objects with unstable governments and poor people.....It's still going on. We have contacts with artefacts to sell and clients wanting to buy them."

Please don't laugh, she'd probably hurt him if he laughed, or run out of his room naked.

"I'm not that surprised, I knew there had to be something." He said. "The lifestyle you and Clara live, when you've both got low paid jobs. My first guess was drugs."

Wow, that was far too close to the truth. Tim knew them though. She just hoped that none of their neighbours had made similar assumptions.

"It'll mean leaving the hotel. Do you want to give the HR lady a really bad day Tim ? Tell her you're leaving and come with me."

"Just like that ?"

"Yep, just like that. You might lose your final pay. I heard the hotel is a bit famous for doing that."

"What would I do Laura ? I refuse to be a kept man."

"You can be my road manager. Cars need to be hired, equipment moved about. And it's always easier to travel as a couple than a woman on her own. Nice hotels, decent food and no having to suck up to rude customers."

"It sounds like I'd be your PA."

"I'll pay you four times what you earn here."

"You know what I'm paid ?"

"Yes, I do. I started off as a trainee."

He was giving her his best roguish grin.

"Will we be doing anything illegal ?"

"Oh yes."

"Is there a chance we might end up in an Egyptian jail ?"

"Most definitely."

"I'm in, when do we leave ?"

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Simon was getting better at flying, though he still hated it. He'd heard all the usual statistics, how flying was the safest form of travel. His favourite way to get about had been by horse and cart, and you never heard about one of those ending up as a burning wreck on a hillside. An experienced horse would even find its way home if you were drunk.

"It would take too long to get there by car or train." Said Clara. "Stop pulling faces."

"I will never get used to these things." He said.

"We're probably safer than in your old van."

If the engine stopped in his van, it probably wasn't going to plummet into the ground, but it didn't seem the appropriate time to mention that.

"Is it a long drive from the airport ?" He asked.

Clara knew, Laura had gone through the route, even marking the roads on a paper map. The map was unfolded across their laps.

"I can see why Laura moans about airports that are quite a way from the city they serve." Said Clara.

"I've hired an anonymous looking four door car, no one will look at twice. It is a fairly long drive, though luckily the route is straightforward."

"Crap, it goes right across the map." He said.

"Sleep if you like, I'll drive."

"I might take you up on that. When are we seeing Judith?"

"I'll call her from the hotel, but I can't see her wanting to meet up until tomorrow. With luck....We should have a quiet evening to settle in."

"Never say that, you know it's bad luck." Said Simon. "Saying we'll have a quiet night is provoking lady luck to mess with us. We'll probably get arrested now, or our luggage will go missing."

Clara was laughing at him, as she folded up the map.

"Sometimes Simon, you sound just like Laura." She said. "I think our strange surrogate daughter is having an effect on you, a bad effect."

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~ Cyril ~

Cyril H Carter it said on his business cards. The H had been an affectation, because not having a middle name seemed a bit naff. Cyril ran a company that created artificial protein, which was processed into vegetarian food that looked and tasted like real meat. 'Cyril's Petit Champignon', as the company was called, was very profitable. Artificial meat was huge, trendy and very much of the moment, even if he rarely touched the stuff. Cyril was doing well enough to be completely legit, but as Simon had once asked him.

"Where's the fun in that Cyril?"

South London gangs don't tend to be called gangs or firms, or have names. The police tend to call them something for their records and the name sticks. The now deceased William Jarrold had been the undisputed leader of the gang, so the police had them down as the Jarrold gang for years. Bill Jarrold had brought in the people he'd known as kids, the tough kids who didn't mind a bit of mayhem.

"Do you remember the night when we....."

Was probably the most said phrase when they met up for a wedding, or a Christmas get together at someone's house. Cyril was tame now, a real indoor kitty with trimmed claws. He could afford to be civilised, there were at least fifty hard men waiting to unleash mayhem at his bidding.

"In the day though, when we were all young and hungry...."

Was another popular way to start a story about the old days, the time when Bill's gang had been responsible for half the violence in South London. Simon had killed Bill Jarrold and by right, Simon should have taken over leadership of the gang. He wasn't like that though, Simon just wanted to be left in peace to pursue his own interests. Cyril had become the leader and all the old feelings had resurfaced. The wonderful feeling of being a violent man, enjoying the brutality of a violent life.

"In the day, when we were all young, stupid and hungry." He told Harry Beck. "There was a night when just four of us took on the whole Quinnell gang..... Oh, if you weren't a fucking copper."

"Do you think I'm going to arrest the man who's paying for my pension?" Asked Beck. "Say what you like Cyril....I stop being a cop when I set foot in your office."

It was a game they played, swapping stories about excess on both sides. It wasn't just the criminals doing people's legs in those days. Before the Police and Criminal Evidence Act came along in nineteen eighty four, policing in London was like the wild west.

"Quinnell had a pub called the Warrior in those days." Said Cyril. "A spit and sawdust pub in Rotherhithe, with strippers every night of the week."

"I remember that place." Said Harry Beck. "You needed penicillin if you were daft enough to use the gent's toilet. Burning it to the ground did London a favour Cyril."

"I don't know who set the fire. That happened early on, before the lights went out. Most of the fighting was done in the dark, with smoke making us cough and choke."

"I'm sure you've told me before Cyril, but I'd love to hear it again." Said Beck.

"Not much to tell really, we were young, crazy and probably a little drunk. Bill Jarrold was that kind of man then, the sort you'd follow anywhere. He lost something as he got older, but in those days.....I went into Quinnell's pub with a huge ball pein hammer in my hand, and a feeling that I wasn't going to survive the night."

"How many were you up against?"

"Ten Bill said, though Reggie Bailey said there were twelve of them in there."

"Christ..... How many of you came out again?"

"Two, just Bill and me..... Reggie Bailey never made it, and Dave Brown died in hospital a week later." Beck was giving him the look everyone had given him at the time. Fear, respect and a little of something else that wasn't easy to name. He'd been a hard man then, toxic masculinity the papers called it now. Until the next enemy rose up to threaten their way of life. They'd all be cheering the hard men on again then.

"I heard it was you.....Did you kill Quinnell?" Asked Beck.

"Yes it was me. Bill gave me credit for it too, no claiming he did it, as he would have done a few years later. I'd taken a few swings in the dark and smoke. I might have killed another man besides Quinnell, I heard someone else's bones break. Not only dark and smoky, it was getting hot too and the only light was from the flames. One man never walked again after I put the hammer across his knees. By the time I saw Quinnell's face I was ready for anything. He was aiming a gun at me and he fired it. I've still got a scar on my neck, where the bullet cut a groove through the muscle."

"But in the end you came out and he didn't" Said Beck.

"I felt the hammer go through his skull and into his brain. He fell and I just wandered about, covered in his blood. It was just good luck that I found the front door before the flames caught me. I still have a few areas of burn scarring on my back."

There it was, that look again. Cyril had told just about everyone the story before, or at least everyone he trusted. After all, there was a very long statute of limitations on murder. The difference this time was being honest about his own feelings at the time.

"Is Simon like that?" Asked Beck. "Does he enjoy the mayhem?"

"Difficult to get into his head, but I'd say no. Simon seems to just see violence as a means to an end, a way to protect and expand his own interests."

"Drugs you mean? Mainly the new designer stuff."

"You did say you're not a cop in my office." Said Cyril. "So this is all off the record?"

"Relax.... Relax, I'm not starting anything against Simon. Organised crime isn't in the tabloids every day. Not since he sorted out the Bill Jarrold problem. No turf wars, no half dozen bodies found in old warehouses, or missing henchmen. Simon is good news, even if he is a drug dealer."

Simon's underworld fame had grown after he'd killed Jarrold, while Bill was a prisoner in Belmarsh Prison. He'd even made it look as though another inmate had done the deed. Beck knew all about it of course, though Cyril had no intention of mentioning Laura's part in it.

"Alright, Simon has built up a drug empire." Said Cyril. "No aiming sales at schools and colleges though, adult customers only."

"I know he's removed a lot of the competition, I've seen the missing person reports."

Cyril just smiled, there were limits to how much he trusted any off the record chat with a cop, even Beck. Harry Beck was quite a high flyer these days, he even got invited to garden parties at the palace.

"Is it too early for a drop of decent malt?" Asked Cyril.

“Alright, I’ll get off that subject. And no, it’s never too early.”

The drink helped take the edge off, it always did. Cyril was determined not to let drink become a problem, but he suspected he’d already crossed that line. Beck seemed to be ready to talk about the real reason for his visit to the offices of ‘Cyril’s Petit Champignon’.

“Anyway.....A little bird told me Simon has left the country.” Said Beck. “Not under his own name, but using a passport good enough to get past immigration. Not that I feel obligated to do anything about it.”

“He’s a few chores to do in the Middle East. Nothing to worry about Harry, I promise.”

“Chores for you ?”

“No, I believe he’s doing a favour for an old friend. To be honest, I have no idea what he’s doing in Jerusalem.”

He topped up his own glass and then Harry’s, another part of the ritual.

“If only his chores had been in the Caribbean Cyril, or somewhere quiet like Norway. Jerusalem is a problem.....To say it’s a powder keg is putting it mildly. I do hope Simon isn’t trading with the wrong side, which is difficult to avoid as everyone is the wrong side in the Middle East.”

Cyril shrugged.

“I have no idea what he’s doing, but I don’t think it’s work related.”

“If you talk to him, mention my concerns. He’s actually pretty high up in my good books at the moment. Tell him to be careful, will you do that for me Cyril ? Tell him to be good.”

“I will Harry, I will.”

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Patsy had arranged a goodbye pizza and drink with Laura. She’d already warned her boss she might be a little late the next morning.

“My best friend is going abroad, maybe for years.” She’d told him.

“Where is she going ?”

“The Middle East.”

“She must be mad, it’s always on the news and never for a good reason.”

Her boss was the type of person who thought the Isle of Wight was going to strange places abroad. He had a point though, parts of the Middle East did seem highly dangerous. Laura was her best friend though, she was determined to put on a happy face and give her a good send off.

Patsy had a set of keys for the house in Hornsey, pretty good going for ‘the other woman.’ Hard to tell what Clara thought of her, but she definitely didn’t hate her. Patsy had been accepted as one of the family, which still gave her a warm glow. She knew the truth about the three vampires who shared the house and if you’re going to be part of a family.....You couldn’t do much better than being looked after by three tough vampires.

“Hello it’s only me.” She called out. “Is anyone home ?”

No answer and the house felt empty. A few lights were on, some were on timers, as was a radio in the kitchen. Patsy had agreed to pop in a few times a week and turn on a few other things, just to add a bit of variety to the pattern. She turned on two tiffany style lamps in the lounge.

“Hello.....It’s Patsy.” She yelled.

The TV went on next, for a little company in what was obviously an empty house. Laura should have been home, but sometimes the Piccadilly Line could be unreliable. Patsy’s next stop was the kitchen and the fridge that always seemed full of wine.

“Come to me my friend Pouilly-Fuissé.” She muttered.

Laura called it fussy pussy after a few drinks. The wine was wonderfully cooled, just the right thing after a hard day selling car parts to a shop full of scruffy guys. Not that she didn't have a connection with some of them, a few were trying to find a kitten for her mum.

"Oh, come on Laura.....I'm starving."

Too tempting to stay in the kitchen, she'd start eating bacon sandwiches. She'd been a wannabe vegetarian, until Simon had got her hooked on bacon sarnies. With all the trimmings of course and oodles of brown sauce. Patsy picked up her wine and headed upstairs.

"I'm allowed, I have a key." She muttered.

She wasn't even convincing herself. She'd been in Laura's room on her own a few times, but the addiction to being there seemed to be getting worse, rather than better. Laura was a vampire, a cool one at that. For a while there had been a sword leaning against the wardrobe, something Laura called a Wakizashi.

"I took it off a Silver Dawn assassin..... It's probably priceless." Laura had told her.

Another time Patsy had been going through a drawer and found a gun, a heavy handgun. Asking about it would have meant giving a reason for looking in the drawer, so the gun was still a mystery. Laura tended to keep her own guns in a secret lair.

"I wish I could live in this room..... Forever." She muttered.

Laura would be home soon, but Laura always shouted out as she came through the front door.

Another sip of her wine and Patsy chose the purple set of drawers next to the bed. She knelt, her hand trembling as she opened the bottom drawer.

"Oh... Wow."

They were still there, the handcuffs with several bloodstains on the silver metal. It might be that Tim was into that sort of thing of course. Patsy refused to entertain such a mundane explanation of course. In her mind Laura had used the cuffs to control an assassin, perhaps the same one who'd once carried the Wakizashi. The sound of movement made her spin round.

"I'm sorry." She said.

He was sat there, cross legged on Laura's fluffy mauve rug. Patsy hadn't seen Laura's Gudara properly, though she had heard about him. There had been a few glimpses in passing, but they'd never been introduced. He was Laura's protector sometimes, sometimes her muse too. Patsy decided to be brave, sitting on the floor in front of him, close enough for their knees to touch. He couldn't talk, but he made a friendly gurgling sound at the back of his throat.

"You probably know about me, I'm Patsy."

Very large, naked and obviously male, though Patsy tried not to stare at his genitals. His huge simian head nodded at her and there was the gurgling noise again. Dark skin, almost as dark as night. A muscular body that looked human, but the head didn't match. A nasty head in some ways, with its jaw full of long sharp teeth. One tooth was so large that the Gudara couldn't quite close his mouth. A trail of spittle was running over his jaw and then down his chest. He looked half man, half large primate, like something out of Egyptian mythology.

"Did you come to see Laura?"

Another nod, before one of his huge hands, momentarily squeezed one of hers. Laura had talked about trying to improve his socialising skills. It was irresistible, she had to put her hand out and grip the back of his huge, claw like hand.

"Laura should be home soon. I'll ask her to come and see you."

More friendly gurgling while she stood up and left the room. The shock hit her on the stairs, the sheer size of the creature she'd been sitting next to, close enough to touch.

“Jeeezzzz Laura.” She muttered. “What other weird things are in your life ?”

There was Mabina of course, though Patsy now had a sort of truce with her. Patsy’s legs began to tremble as she went down the stairs. There was no plan, other than getting into the kitchen to fill up her wine glass. Setting the table next, something nice and routine to calm her down. She never did here Laura unlock the front door.

“Hello, I’m home.” Shouted Laura.

“I’m in the kitchen.”

Patsy didn’t drop anything, but the stainless steel cutlery was rattling in her hand.

“Are you alright ?” Laura asked her. “What happened ?”

“I was in your room and..... I saw your Gudara.”

“You were in my room ?”

“Sorry I.....”

Laura was grinning at her.

“That’s alright, I’ve been right through your knicker drawer. Come on, you might as well meet my Gudara properly.”

Laura was off, walking quickly towards the stairs.

“You’ve been through my underwear drawer ?” Asked Patsy.

“Yes, I love the red silk panties with white dots. I can see why Simon loves them.”

Laura was taking the stairs two at a time, Patsy had to almost run to keep up.

“Simon really told you that ?” She asked.

“Come on keep up. My Gudara should have found out what’s causing the trouble in Jerusalem. My money is on a Jinn, a bored and really pissed off Jinn.”

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Clara had wanted to be adventurous with their choice of hotel, perhaps even choosing somewhere with a slightly tainted reputation. Time had been against her though, having to finalise their plans in a single day. She’d booked them into the American Colony Hotel; the same place Mabina and Laura has stayed in Jerusalem. They’d liked the place and all the online pictures looked so green and lush. As she stopped their hired car, several people arrived as if by magic.

“Leave the keys; we’ll take care of the car and your bags.”

So that kind of service really was given to everyone. Laura had always wondered if it had been because Mabina had given them a hard time during previous visits. Checking in was easy and straightforward, until the woman behind the desk gave her a slip of paper.

“A message was left for you earlier today.”

A message from Judith, inviting herself to join them in the hotel restaurant for dinner. She’d even had the nerve to book them a table. Clara handed the note to Simon.

“It’s your fault; tempting fate by saying we’d have a quiet night.” She told him.

“But that was you.....Crap, did you notice the time ? We’ve only got an hour to unpack, shower and change before she arrives.”

Despite being tired Clara took it all in, the opulence of the hotel lobby, the lush plants that seemed to cover the hotel in a sea of green. Their room turned out to be a suite instead of a room, upgraded courtesy of Judith.

“Alright, she’s forgiven.” Said Clara.

For two people who never sunbathed, Clara had been amazed at how much light summer clothing had been in their wardrobes. A good long shower, followed by dressing in something cool and

casual, but not too casual, and they were both ready. She was quite pleased with how they both looked in the bathroom's full length mirror.

"Not bad.....I bet Judith arrives with three moonlighting cops dressed in suits." She said.

"They might not be keen on working for her, since three of them were killed in London."

The phone rang at exactly eight local time. Reception telling them their dinner guests had arrived.

"We mustn't let Judith set the timescale." Said Simon. "Looking over the building is fine, but Laura knows the local hocus pocus."

"Hocus pocus?"

"You know what I mean, she's got a direct line to the local deities."

"I do know what you mean, just don't call it hocus pocus to Judith."

They were almost at the restaurant before she realised Judith might not know Laura was likely to show up with Tim. Still, that was Laura's own concern, she wasn't a child.

"Do we tell her about Laura bringing Tim?" She asked.

"I suppose we should mention it.....Oh Laura, we should have beaten her more when she was young."

"Idiot."

She couldn't help laughing as they entered the restaurant. Judith wasn't surrounded by off duty members of the Jerusalem police. Her only companion was another woman. Judith did the introductions.

"Simon, Clara...So pleased you're here. This is Raine, who has seen our problem."

"More than just seen, as you can probably tell." Said Raine. "I'll tell you what happened after we've eaten."

English with a touch of a local accent, Raine was probably one of the local Psochics who'd been injured by whatever horror walked through the building once owned by Sam Isaacs. Like them she'd gone for light, loose clothing. Her upper left arm was thickly bandaged from shoulder to elbow.

"We're not squeamish." Said Simon.

"The waiters here can be a bit over attentive." Said Judith. "We'll talk over the coffees."

The meal was wonderful, even if the waiters were a little too attentive. Once they'd eaten desert and ordered coffees, it was time for Raine to tell her story.

"There were three of us, though I'd never seen the other two before." She said. "We were just going to remove all the files from the downstairs offices and the archive in the basement. We thought we'd be safe....We were told we'd be safe."

"The order is paying for the best healthcare." Said Judith. "The creature did seem to be keeping to the upper floors."

"What did it do to your arm?" Asked Simon.

"Deep cuts, four of them at a time." Said Raine. "Like sharp claw marks, four fingers but no thumb."

"Did anyone take pictures?" Asked Clara.

Judith nodded and passed an envelope across the table. As Raine had told them, the cuts were deep. Probably deep enough to cut tendons and muscles.

"Will your arm be alright?" Asked Clara.

"They're not sure.....There's still a lot of pain."

"As I said, the order has provided the best healthcare available." Said Judith.

"I'm sure you have." Said Simon. "Where were you when it attacked Raine?"

“Silly.....So silly.” Said Raine. “It tried to push me out of Sam’s old office. Not a gentle push either, it nearly pushed me over. The third time it told me to leave. ‘Get Out,’ it yelled at me. I should have left.... Now... This arm might never heal properly.”

“Did you see it ?” Asked Clara.

“Not really, just a green blur. It seemed to move so fast.”

“That’s what happened to me.” Said Judith. “It called out my name though.... It moved so fast.”

“Did it talk to you in English Raine ?” Asked Simon.

The poor woman still seemed in shock, looking over her shoulder before answering.

“I’m not really sure.” She said. “I know that sounds crazy. I understood what it was yelling at me well enough. Later on though, when I was being treated in hospital. I repeated the words it had said to a nurse. She said I’d spoken in Arabic, and.....I don’t speak Arabic.”

“That is strange.” Said Simon.

“Can we talk to the other two who were in the building with Raine ?” Asked Clara.

The feeling of something unnatural going on was obviously catching. Even Judith was looking behind her, as if making sure her words wouldn’t be overheard.

“The man wasn’t injured and has since left our employ.” She said. “To be honest we have no idea where he is now. The other woman had her face badly lacerated and was sent to a medical facility in the USA. I’m told her mental health suffered in the incident. I doubt whether she’d be coherent enough to talk to you.”

“Looks like you’re stuck with me.” Said Raine.

“Anything else ? Can you think of anything that happened that might be useful ?” Asked Clara.

“It had an odd smell. Quite pleasant.... Like the inside of a florists.”

“Jasmine.....I thought it smelled of Jasmine.” Said Judith.

“Did you find anything in Sam’s papers ?” Asked Clara. “A clue of some kind, even just a note saying he’d left a watchdog or a trap ?”

“No, we’ve been through everything.....Twice.” Said Judith.

“We’ll come and look around the building tomorrow.” Said Simon. “Get a feel for the place...But Laura will be here soon and she’ll hopefully know what we’re dealing with.”

“No problem, I know Laura has a natural affinity for the.....How to put it ?”

“Weird and strange ?” Asked Clara.

“Yes.....I can appreciate you want to wait for her to arrive.”

It wasn’t a great time to mention Tim, but no time was ever going to be perfect.

“Laura is bringing Tim with her, her boyfriend and he’s....A muggle. I’m sure you know what I mean.” Judith was actually chuckling.

“Oh dear, that must be fun in your house.” She said. “No problem, he’s unlikely to meet any members of the order. Shall I arrange to have you picked up at say.....Eight tomorrow morning ?”

“That’s fine.” Said Clara.

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Simon hadn’t expected Judith to bring an army of heavily armed Psochics with her, though he was surprised she’d turned up on her own. She wasn’t even going to show them around the building. Judith was dragging a chair as close to the front door as she could get it.

“I’ll give you the keys and access cards.” She said. “I have no intention of leaving this chair though.”

He was given the keys, while Clara got the magnetic access cards and a list of what everything did.

“I wouldn’t trust the elevators, they’ve been playing up.” Said Judith. “Use the stairs, the access cards will open all the doors leading off the stairwell.”

"It just keeps getting better and better." Said Simon.

"You'll do well out of this, just get rid of.... Whatever it is." Said Judith. "There are hundreds of crates on the top floor. Sam kept saying one of them held a genuine Picasso and Sam didn't lie about things like that. Take care of our little problem and you can keep the contents of six crates."

"Any of the crates?" Asked Simon.

"Yes, any of them, your choice. Open them all up if you like. Just do it after you've dealt with the creature up there."

"You could at least show us where the stairs are." Said Clara.

Judith shook her head and remained wedged in the chair. She did point past them, her finger aimed at what looked like a kitchen.

"Through the kitchen." She said. "On through where the copier is, then the room with the vacuum cleaner. Out of there and turn left....The door to the stairs is right there, you can't miss it."

She did have one last thing to yell at them, as they went through the kitchen.

"Good luck!"

Neither of them bothered to thank her. They found the door to the stairs easily enough, though it did need an access card. Clara began to look at the list they'd been given.

"This will get very boring, very quickly." Said Simon. "I vote that we see how vampire proof these doors are."

"Judith will get upset."

"Are we worried?"

"Laura might need her help for whatever it is she's up to."

It sort of made sense. Simon stopped working out where the weak spot on the door was likely to be.

"Do you really think there's a Picasso up there?" He asked.

"Might be, Laura was always saying Sam was eccentric, but he was also a rich eccentric."

"Is something like that even sellable?"

"I guarantee Mabina knows six people who could sell it for us. Ahhh here it is....Ground floor stairwell is the yellow card with a rainbow stripe."

The door opened and they were into the stairwell.

"How about going all the way up and working our way down?" He suggested.

"You just want to see if there's a crate with Picasso written on it."

"Don't you?"

"Come on then, beat you to the top."

Several doors and more digging through Judith's notes. It didn't take them long though, until they were stood in front of the doors to Sam's private stores. Clara was hesitant and the notes on how to open the complex set of locks looked tortuous.

"I'm going to call Judith." Said Clara.

A lot of muttering down her phone as Clara used several access cards and a few keys. From what he heard of the conversation, alarms not going off was the only way to know they'd done it right.

"Last one." Clara muttered.

Laura had told them about Liz opening all the locks, on her own and in almost total darkness. Simon was just happy when the doors finally opened after a lot of cursing, muttering and tips over the phone from Judith. They walked into the large top floor storage area.

"Wow, when I heard about packing crates, this isn't what I thought of." Said Clara. "I thought they'd be the sort of thing we used to move house."

Simon knew what she meant, some of them were huge.

“Look at the one with the blue circle on it.” He said. “It would hold most of the stuff in our house...Make that all the stuff in our house. There must be a huge freight elevator somewhere.”

“Probably on the fritz, like everything else in this building.” Said Clara. “So..... How about I go right, while you go left. Just to get a feel for the place, but if a crate is already open.....”

“Judith won’t be happy.” He said, with a grin on his face.

“Fuck Judith.”

He heard Clara’s phone ring as she walked away.

“Probably Judith telling us not to open up any crates.” He muttered.

So far there had been no sign of the guardian creature left by Sam. Simon hoped it was wary of vampires, though he doubted it. He wandered past columns of stacked crates, grabbing a pry bar from the top of one.

“Nothing.....Calls out to me. Nothing shouts open me up.”

When he saw the three crates standing on their own, it was the dust that grabbed his attention. They’d been dusted, but the dirt had got deep into the gaps in the wood. The wood had yellowed too, something that took decades to happen, maybe centuries.

“Now these look interesting.”

He knelt in front of the first crate, using the pry bar to open it up. Paintings, lots of paintings, some wrapped in cloth. Simon pulled one out, purely because he’d caught a glimpse of mauve background behind a cloth covering.

“Clara !” He yelled. “I’ve found some old paintings.”

No answer, she’d probably found other things to claim her attention. He used the cloth to carefully wipe the painting over. An oil painting of a clipper ship on the Thames by the look of it, though the colours looked wrong. There was a worn envelope attached to the back of the frame. Simon didn’t read the entire contents, just the lines which said he was holding a Turner, a verified, authenticated and genuine Turner. He was no art expert, but even he’d heard of Turner.

“Clara ! First crate I’ve opened and..... You have to see this.”

He knew she was alright. There she was in his mind, a calm and static yellow aura not that far away. He’d have known if she was in trouble, but she wasn’t. Simon was a little angry at being ignored....Unless.

“Fuck..... Did you find the Picasso ?” He yelled.

Clara was sat cross legged in front of the creature they’d come to deal with. It was less than six feet away from her and it wasn’t moving about at lightning speed. It was moving to left or right and then back again, but doing it quite slowly. A tall mess of green, shimmering filaments that could be its body, or an aura. Simon sat on the floor next to Clara.

“So that’s it ?” He asked.

“Yes, that’s it.”

“Be nice to know what it is....Got any ideas ?”

“I know what it is, Laura just called. Her Gudara did a little investigating for her and it appears Sam left a Jinn as a guard dog.”

“Her Gudara that can’t talk told her that..... How does that work ?” He asked.

Clara was tapping the side of her head and it was irresistible.

“Yes, I know Laura is a little mad, but that doesn’t explain it.”

She pinched his arm enough to make him yelp.

“It doesn’t look very dangerous at the moment.” He said.

“Laura told me a few words to use, to calm it down. It can hear us by the way, and probably understand every word.”

“Wonderful.” He said. “Did Laura tell you anything else that might help ?”

“Not really, no.”

It hit him suddenly, though he should have realised sooner.

“We’re not coming back to deal with it are we ?” He asked. “This is it.....We’re doing it right here, right now.”

“That seems to be what’s happening.”

“Alright, plans change.” He said. “So..... What do we do ?”

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