

## Quid Pro Quo

(Season three of London's Night Stalkers)

### Chapter 4 – The Couziniers

**“I read a few books on the occult when I was in Italy.” Said Simon. “I remember that Jinns are just another part of creation. No nonsense about being created out of smokeless flames, they’re as much a part of this world as humans....And us.”**

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~ Daniel ~

Daniel had once gone by the name of Isaac Laquedem, the wandering Jew, famous for having an unnaturally extended life. He found it hard to be sure now, if the name had really been his, or he'd heard it somewhere and decided to use it. He'd met a few other Isaac Laquedems on his travels, all claiming to be the original. There had even been a fight with one of them, he'd been lucky to escape without serious injury. Eventually he'd chosen the name Daniel, though he could no longer accurately remember why. Memories did that after a few hundred years. Facts became mingled up with dreams, delusions and wishful thinking. Plus his memory had never been that perfect to begin with.

“Can you get Jack for me ?” Asked Gwen. “The boy hasn't had breakfast yet.”

“I saw him heading towards the pig pen.” Said Daniel.

Jack, also known as the boy, wasn't really a boy anymore. Learning difficulties they called it now, though Daniel hated the term. To him Jack was just a little slow in picking things up, and that didn't need to be a major problem on a small holding in Scotland. Jack was now in his early twenties and he probably wasn't going to be an academic, but he was a master at handling the pigs, a real self-taught expert. Interestingly both Jack and his mother Gwen knew there was something unusual about Daniel. It was their elephant in the room, which they all danced around on a daily basis. Daniel suspected neither of them thought he might really be a vampire.

“Jack..... Where are you boy ?” Shouted Daniel.

The pigs had grown in number since Daniel has given up selling junk electronics on Ebay and concentrated on making a living out of his small holding. Gwen had a few acres on her place too, and between them they were living quite well. Jack's favourite animals were the pigs. Daniel opened the door to the shed, where the pregnant sows were housed, sheltered from the worst of the Scottish weather. Pitmedden in the Parish of Udney wasn't that far from Aberdeen and the winds could be ferocious at any time of the year.

“I knew I'd find you in here, you're late for.....”

Daniel was shocked but not scared. Jack was sat cross legged on the grubby floor, his knees touching those of the huge creature in front of him. Daniel had never seen Laura's Gudara properly, but he'd seen enough to recognise the creature. He felt no fear because he knew Jack had seen the Gudara before; they'd actually sat and talked for a while in Laura's room in Hornsey. Laura described her Gudara as a creature from the realm of dreams, but it looked more like a nightmare. There sat Jack, forehead against forehead with one of the first, one of the original vampires.

“It's alright..... Fine..... I'll sit right here.” Said Daniel.

A silly thing to say, he wasn't really thinking clearly. As far as he knew, the Gudara, Laura's supernatural guardian, could only appear when summoned by her. Yet there it was in the pig barn, sitting with Jack. After a few minutes Jack leant back and looked at him.

"He wants to talk to you, but you can't hear him." Said Jack.

"You can hear him?"

"Yes."

"How?..... How do you hear him?"

That was always the problem with Jack. He wasn't stupid, he just didn't have the right words to explain things. The boy who wasn't really a boy anymore, shrugged at him.

"I just can.....He told me you know a storm is approaching. He said you've known about it for a long time."

How much to tell or admit? Everything obviously had to go through Jack, who didn't know he fed on human blood. If the Gudara said anything to give that away, Jack was certain to tell Gwen.

"Yes, I felt the storm beginning." He said. "Not that I could do anything about it."

The Gudara growled, a deep menacing sound that was anything but friendly. It was easy to forget that although the brute couldn't speak, it could understand what was said. More foreheads touching between the creature and Jack.

"He said you knew..... You must have felt the keeper of the last gate was the cause."

"Liz, he must mean Liz Grant." Said Daniel.

The noises coming from Laura's creature became friendly, a chortling sound that was almost feline. It was nodding furiously at him.

"I knew about the way Liz was changed." Said Daniel. "Yes, I should have looked into it. The others were obviously pleased to get back to London and Magda had been.....There had been a lot of unpleasantness. So yes, I decided to ignore the problem and hope it went away."

More touching heads between the creature and Jack. It was all taking so much time and Gwen might decide to look for them. Gwen wasn't a soft townie, but he doubted if she'd take seeing the Gudara in her stride.

"You must help the keeper of the last gate." Said Jack. "It's the only way to stop the storm. You must help her, or stop her.....I think he means kill her."

"How Jack? How do I help her?"

"It will be obvious. He can take you there."

The Gudara was reaching out, as if to grab him then and there.

"I can't go now, there's too much to arrange."

"Tonight, he can come back for us tonight."

"Us?! You can't go."

"I have to, it's.....Essential."

"Don't be ridiculous Jack, your mother would never....."

The Gudara grabbed his arm, squeezing, making him yell out in pain. Jack had hold of his arm too, as he looked at him.

"I have to go." Yelled Jack. "It's essential."

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"You're certain it's nonaggressive?" Asked Judith.

Clara had called her, saying the creature on the top floor was a Jinn and that Laura had told her the sacred and secret words to calm it down. The description had sounded strange, but a truly ancient Jinn could pretty much change its appearance at will.

"It is for now, though the effect might not last." Said Clara. "You're the expert on these things Judith. We need your help about what to do next."

"I'm not an expert....Magda was the expert."

"Judith ! Don't make me come down there to get you."

"Alright, alright. I'm on my way."

It was what she'd been hoping to avoid. Probably paranoia, but she'd been feeling marked in some way, since the creature had left the white streak in her hair. Marked by more than the visible, it felt as though her soul had been marked. Judith picked up her phone and personal key card, before pressing the button on the elevator. It was worth a try, as the Jinn sounded to be in some sort of passive state.

"Wow.....Now, do I have the guts to use it ?" She muttered.

No sparking, weird noises, or flickering lights. The elevator door opened to reveal what looked like a completely normal elevator. Judith's heart was thumping a little, as she entered the elevator. Her finger reached for the top floor button and froze for a second or so.

"You've travelled with vampires you silly bitch.....Press it."

She jumped as the elevator jerked a little as it began to rise, before remembering it had always done that. Paranoia of course and it had been getting worse recently. Poor dead Sam had once explained it to her, in his own perfect, if slightly quirky way.

"You don't believe in 'Ghoulies and Ghosties, long-leggety Beasties, and Things that go Bump in the Night,' Judith, you've seen them. You've crossed the line from wanting to believe, to knowing they exist. You've seen the terrible damage they can cause and not just to the physical body."

Not just her life was in danger, she knew that for a fact. The Jinn had marked her soul in some way she didn't understand. She badly needed Magda with her head full of detailed knowledge.

"But those idiots killed her." She muttered.

Tempting to return to the lobby, lock the doors from the outside and leave the vampires to their fate. The Psochic Order needed to sell the building though and there was a real possibility the Jinn would spread its nocturnal wanderings to other buildings in the street. Judith left the elevator and entered Sam's special stores, the place where he kept the priceless, the unobtainable and the downright dangerous.

"It didn't look like that." She said. "I saw its feet, which weren't human, but they looked like flesh, blood and bone."

They were there, sat on the floor as though a green swirling Jinn was the most natural thing in the world.

"I read a few books on the occult when I was in Italy." Said Simon. "I remember that Jinns are just another part of creation. No nonsense about being created out of smokeless flames, they're as much a part of this world as humans....And us."

"With all such books, the truth tends to be the particular version of the truth, believed by whoever wrote the book." Said Judith. "One day I might let you read some of the books in the Psochic archives. You're right though, the Jinn are a natural part of creation."

"Wonderful.....Great to know." Said Clara. "So, now it looks calm.....Any ideas on how to get rid of it ?"

The green swirl took on a different hue, as Judith walked closer.

"It marked me in some way, I feel it. I don't feel hostility though, just that it wants to.....Touch me."

"Probably not a good idea." Said Simon.

“They don’t think like us.” Said Judith. “They do things that seem strange, sometimes crazy, psychotic things. But they only seem that way to us...To the Jinn, it all makes perfect sense.” Simon and Clara stood up as she walked closer to the swirling green Jinn. It wanted to connect with her, it needed to connect with her. It had to be her choice though.

“What are you doing Judith ?” Asked Clara. “After hiding downstairs, you can’t be thinking about touching that thing.”

“I’m assuming you both brought weapons ?”

In answer to her question, both of them were pulling edged weapons out of their clothing. Simon held a long thin blade of blue steel, while Clara held something curved and wicked looking.

“Think carefully before you touch it Judith.” Said Clara.

“It needs to be anchored to break the harness Sam put on it.” Said Judith. “It’s calm now, almost there....By touching it I can set it free. Be ready though, you’ll need to fight it to drive it away. You can’t kill it.....Just drive it out of this place.”

“Are you really sure about this ?” Asked Clara.

“Yes, and you’re not helping.”

Judith walked right up to the Jinn, as close as she could without sharing the same personal space. She hoped she was right, or her life might be about to end. She reached out her right hand and touched the swirling mass.

“Ow.... Fuck....That hurt.” She said.

Like an electric shock and the green swirl stopped swirling. It changed gradually, to become.... Her. Judith found herself looking into her own face, her own eyes, her own expression. It had extracted a tiny bit of her essence, her soul and used to it create a copy to inhabit. Judith knew it was now free of whatever Sam had done to fix it to the building.

“Now.....Drive it out !” She yelled.

Clara’s curved blade went past her eyes, as the vampires began to fight the now corporeal Jinn. It was like watching them try to kill her, even if it was just a copy of her. Judith backed towards the wall, trying to do her trick of looking small when threatened with violence. It wasn’t cowardice, just common sense. Two vampires fighting a powerful ancient Jinn..... She sat on the floor, her back against the wall, trying to breathe without making a sound.

“Damn it bit me.” Yelled Clara. “Keep away from its teeth.”

“And its finger nails, they’re like sharpened steel.” Shouted Simon.

Like the wind they moved, a destructive whirlwind. Several stacks of crates went over, creating debris, bloody debris.

“It’s not leaving Judith.” Yelled Clara.

“Yell at it, tell it Sam is dead, its task is over. Any language will do, yell at it. It will go anyway, when it gets fed up with being attacked by creatures who don’t die easily.”

“I might run out of blood before then.” Shouted Simon. “It’s those teeth.....Damn brute.”

It was odd hearing Simon call the Jinn a brute, when it looked exactly like her. They went beyond where she could see for a while, though the noise continued. The smashing of crates, Simon yelling abuse, while Clara told it to leave, mingled in with some very inventive swearing. Having a name for the Jinn might have helped, but Sam had never written it in his notes. As the battle moved closer again, Judith tried to make herself even smaller, even more crunched up like a ball.

“This fucking thing Judith.....Are you sure it’ll go ?” Asked Simon.

“Yes, I’m certain.....You just need to hurt it enough.”

“Sam is dead, your job is over.” Shouted Clara. “You pathetically stupid creature.”

"I said hurt it, not insult it."

"Seven crates, this shit must be worth seven crates." Said Clara.

The vampires looked bloody, the ground looked bloody. The only encouraging thing was that the Jinn was looking tired and beaten, barely dragging itself across the floor.

"Keep on..... Hurt it ! Really hurt it !" Shouted Judith.

It had heard her, its face looking at her with such hate in its eyes, her eyes. The fight moved her way, Simon and Clara pulling at the brute, trying to stop it getting to her. No use, the three of them were moving too fast, it was like being caught up in a tornado. Up Judith went, pushed up the wall like a rag doll. A scratching feeling in her side caused enough pain for her to cry out.

"Stop it hurting Judith." Shouted Simon.

Judith saw the edge of the desk in her way, though she was too caught up in the fight to change direction. Her head hit the edge of the desk and she fell into a wonderful place, where there were no sharp nails, no vampires, no Jinns, no pain.

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### ~ Walter & Emily ~

When Laura thought about it, the advice was obvious. Grace had been the one speaking the words of wisdom, one of her colleagues on the front desk of the hotel.

"If you're worried about hiring a strange make of car, why not hire the everyday version of your SUV ?"

Everyday version sounded weird, but Laura knew what Grace had meant. There probably weren't many Chevrolet Suburbans with a flame paint job, lowered suspension and generally pimped in the way hers had been. It had taken a few phone calls and there had been the expense of paying for it to be delivered and waiting at Ben Gurion Airport, or Natbag as the locals called it.

"Well, was it worth all the fuss ?" Asked Tim. "You've been driving it for a couple of hours....Is it the dog's bollocks or not ?"

The five point three litre V8, should have felt like hers, but it didn't. The factory spec was exactly the same, right down to the aircon. Nine tenths of the feel of a vehicle was in the suspension though, the shocks.

"Do you want me to be honest ?" She asked.

"Not if it's going to be too painful."

"It feels like driving a strange make of car. Actually more like driving Simon's old van. There's an odd feeling on left hand turns too. On the whole though.....I'm still glad we hired it."

"That's all that really matters." Said Tim.

The weather wasn't as hot as she'd expected on the drive from the airport to Jerusalem, but she was still glad to have aircon in the hired SUV. The scenery changed, the texture of the road changed, yet it still felt like it was going to be a long and boring journey. Laura was glad she'd asked Tim to come. Leaving aside the opportunity for good sex with someone she knew, he had a natural optimism she hadn't really noticed in London. Not mindlessly positive about every piece of crap life threw at him, just a pleasant general optimism. Of course she'd probably end up hating it when they'd spent a few months in each other's company twenty four hours a day.

"I could drive for a bit, if you like ?" Asked Tim.

"Good idea, I might even have a nap."

She pulled off the road near a sign pointing to somewhere called Abu Ghosh. The settlement came quite close to the road and everything looked green and lush.

"Mabina used the old road last time." She said. "It wasn't as nice as this, too dry and dusty."

It was nice to get out of the SUV and stretch her legs for the few seconds it took her to walk round to the passenger side. She saw Walter and Emily Couzinier sat on a stone wall, waiting.

“Stay in the SUV Tim. I shouldn’t be long.”

Tim was stood quite close to her and yet he didn’t reply. When the golden tinge added itself to the sunlight, Laura understood what was going on. Time was frozen around her, though she’d come round to thinking she was in another reality entirely, one created by the ancient Gods. Up was still up and down was still down, but when the golden aura seeped into her world, little else seemed normal. Walter and Emily could move of course, they were actually waving at her. Laura sat on the ground in front of them, ignoring the gritty feeling.

“So..... I’m here.” She told them.

“Indeed you are, we’re so pleased.” Said Emily.

Walter and Emily Couzinier didn’t look dead, even when she’d seen them in the all too real world of rural England. Their bodies still lay where they’d died, in a cave deep under Luxor in Egypt. There they were though, smiling at her like two adoring relatives.

“I need a little time in Jerusalem and then I’m all yours.” Said Laura.

“All his you mean.” Said Walter. “You will be the warrior arm of a God, never forget that. Horus will tell you the first task he requires, once you’ve recovered what is left of our mortal remains.”

“I wish I’d known that when I was down there.”

The Couziniers had been acquirers of the un-acquirable, dealers in the priceless, for a price. Tomb robbers really, famous ones from Ottawa in Canada. Getting trapped in dark places underground was an occupational hazard and it had ended up killing them. They were supposed to have a hidden a horde of treasure somewhere, though there were similar rumours about most dead tomb robbers. For some reason, Laura hadn’t asked them about it.....It seemed impolite.

“As for the matter with the Jinn in Jerusalem.” Said Emily. “That should be resolved very soon.”

“Resolved..... How ?” She asked. “Are Simon and Clara in trouble ?”

“We’re permitted windows, gaps to look through.” Said Walter. “It is not for is to question what is withheld from our gaze. Your friends may be injured, but your kind heal quickly. The fight isn’t important.”

“Their decision afterwards is the key, the point where many paths begin.” Added Emily.

They’d been so down to Earth when she’d met them in England, almost folksy. Now they were beginning to sound like stoned hippies.

“Fine, as long as they’re alright.” Said Laura. “My travelling companion isn’t part of this, he’s a civilian. Please don’t appear on front of him, or do anything weird.”

“Sometimes you can be quite rude Laura.” Said Emily.

“We’ll talk to you again once you’ve recovered our remains.” Said Walter.

The golden tinge to the air vanished, taking Walter and Emily with it. Tim was moving again, as were the swaying palm trees beside the road. He was looking at her, as she sat on the rather grubby soil near the wall.

“How did you.....What are you doing there ?” He asked.

Laura used her hands to brush the dirt off her jeans, as she stood up. She took her phone out her pocket.

“I thought we needed a selfie.....Our first day in the Middle East.” She said.

The sunlight made her nose run and her eyes itch, but the selfie actually looked quite good. She sent it to Clara, with a message asking if they were both alright. It also went to Patsy, who she was really going to miss.

'Having a good time, lots of sunshine.'

Patsy would understand.

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There was pain coming from some of the cuts, but they'd quickly heal. It was the ache getting to Simon, the way every joint, sinew and bone in his body felt pulled, twisted and bruised. The Jinn had gone quite suddenly, leaving a blackened scorch mark on the wall. There had been a crack like thunder and the smell of burning, when it had finally escaped whatever magical binding Sam had used to keep it there. To have the balls to use an ancient Jinn as a guard dog. Simon was beginning to have a grudging respect for the late Sam Isaacs.

"I still think we should call her people." He said. "Judith needs proper medical care."

"Who do we call? They won't come, no one wants to be here. If her people cared, they'd have come here with her. Besides.... If we call an ambulance and she dies, we'll be questioned by the police."

"I know Clara, I seem to remember teaching you that rule. We never have anything to do with the police, ever."

Clara always carried a small surgical kit in her bag, it had become a ritual for her and Laura. A few dressings, a syringe loaded with local anaesthetic and a sewing kit for patching up anything that looked likely to bleed for a while. Judith's head had hit the edge of the desk a glancing blow. A flap of skin had been pulled away from her forehead and Clara was busy stitching it back in place.

"Crap.....Why do head wounds have to bleed so much?" She muttered.

"Just keep her alive.....She has to live." He said.

"Why are you so worried? I like Judith reasonably well, I suppose. I'm not going to get bent out of shape if she doesn't make it."

"We did the job and we haven't been paid." He said. "If she dies and we take what she agreed.....To the Psochics it'll look like we killed her and looted the place."

Clara was actually grinning, as she playfully thumped him on the shoulder.

"That's my Simon, you had me worried for a moment." She said. "I thought you might have developed that most terrible human affliction.....A conscience. I see your point though. Don't worry, head wounds are messy, but she hasn't lost that much blood."

He liked watching Clara as she worked, putting in a semicircle of neat little stitches. She'd been useless at it until Mabina had taught her and Laura the right technique.

"I found an original Turner painting." He said. "Must be worth a small fortune....There's a certificate of authenticity attached to it."

"Sounds wonderful, but if it's been missing for years buyers will want the authentication checked. If we're really lucky a TV company will want to do an arts special on the find of the century. Even if we try to hide from the publicity, with so much going on....."

"Yes, I can see that." He said. "Fame definitely isn't a friend to those who live forever and feed on human blood. We'll look for something easier to sell and more negotiable. Gold would be nice, lots of gold."

Judith began to fidget, trying to touch the wound in her head.

"Not a good idea Judith, keep still." Said Clara. "Just one stitch to finish.....There, you'll do. Very neat work, if I do say so myself."

Judith kept trying to feel her head and Clara kept pushing her hand away.

"No Judith, leave it alone." Said Clara.

"And I wouldn't look in any mirrors for a while." He added.

Simon was no stranger to getting hit hard on the head. Concussion could be difficult, even for a vampire. The struggle to wake up and stay awake, and it had to be tougher for Judith. She blinked at them both a few times.

“Don’t worry the Jinn has gone.” Said Clara. “You’ve a few bruises and a scalp wound is never pretty, but I think you’ll be fine.”

“I know it’s gone, I can feel it isn’t here anymore.” Said Judith. “I need to tell everyone. It looks like me you see, they’ll think it’s me.”

Judith tried to get a phone out a pocket and would have fallen over, if he hadn’t grabbed hold of her.

“Wait for a while, give yourself at least half an hour to properly wake up.” Said Simon.

“I can’t wait....It looks like me Simon.”

There were a few office chairs on wheels, one had arms to rest on. Simon sat Judith in the chair and made sure she was unlikely to fall out.

“Get your words straight before you call anyone.” Said Clara. “If you start rambling they’ll think we’ve drugged you or something.”

“I’ll be fine.....Leave me alone.....Go on, I need a little privacy.”

It was obvious really, they should have seen it coming. Judith was an attractive young woman, who knew her head had been injured. The crying began as soon as her fingers had begun to probe her stitched up scalp.

“Leave it alone.” Shouted Clara. “It’ll get infected..... You need to see a doctor for some antibiotic anywhere and you’re making it worse.”

“Shut up.....Just shut up.”

They listened to her, as she made four phone calls to senior members of her order. She was surprisingly lucid, considering how crazy she must have sounded. She had to warn them that someone who looked exactly like her was on the loose, and likely to be dangerous. Simon even gave her extra points for not using the word Jinn, not even once.

“Alright.....Sorry I was a bitch.” Shouted Judith. “We can talk about your payment now, you’ve earned it.”

Her poor face did look grim and the blood had begun to congeal. Simon was happy that she hadn’t insisted on being pushed into the toilet to see herself in the mirror. Judith was smiling at them.

“You did save my life, so I’m going to show you something special. Did you both notice the huge crate, the biggest in the stores ?”

“Yes, it looks big enough to hold everything we own and then some.” Said Simon.

“Come on then Simon, push me to that crate.... Push me, I’m about to make some of your dark little vampire dreams come true.... You can spoil me a little.... Push me.”

Simon still ached and it felt like his knee joints had been filled with hot, abrasive sand. He pushed Judith in the chair though, actually speeding up when she demanded more speed. She didn’t weigh much anyway. He stopped a few feet away from the crate.

“I’m assuming my next job is popping the side off the crate.” He said.

“Yes.... Do it Simon.....Just you wait. The Couziniers were Sam’s favourite tomb robbers...I’m about to give you the best of their treasures. If you want them of course ?”

“I think we will want them.” Said Clara. “I’ve heard of the Couziniers, Laura found what was left of them in Egypt. They’d been trapped in a tunnel by something nasty.”

Simon found a pry bar and began loosening the nails around the edges of the wooden side of the crate.

“Oh yes, Sam loved anything to do with Walter and Emily.” Said Judith. “I used to see it in his eyes, a certain sparkle if anything of theirs ever came up for sale. Never a proper auction of course, just cash exchanged between those....In the know.”

“Watch out.....This might land with a bang.” Yelled Simon.

Noise and a cloud of dust, as the heavy side of the crate hit the floor. Inside the huge crate were eight smaller crates, the sort of size people use when moving home. Each crate had a stencilled number on the front and an EW-C in black ink.

“You saved my life, so you can have all eight crates.” Said Judith. “You could spend days opening everything in the stores, it might even take weeks. Trust me, this is what you need, the collected treasures of Walter and Emily Couzinier. Sam spent decades finding the pieces and packing them carefully.”

“Can we open one ?” Asked Simon.

“Yes, of course.”

The front of the packing case had been fixed in place by screws, not nails. It took him a while to pry it loose. Eventually it fell forward, revealing contents that looked like Egyptian artefacts wrapped in old pieces of paper.

“Be careful with the packing papers.” Said Judith. “Sadly we didn’t realise for a while, Sam had a little trick up his sleeve. We may have thrown out some real treasures. He liked to use treasure to wrap treasure. Look at every scrunched up piece..... Some of the packing material can be worth more than the contents of the crate.”

Simon pulled screwed up balls of paper from the crate, carefully putting them to one side.

“It looks to be full of Egyptian relics.” Said Simon. “Gold.....I recognise the soft yellow metal.

Fuck....It’s all gold, everything in here.”

“The packing papers Simon, be careful.” Said Judith.

It felt as though the paper fell into his hand at random. Screwed up parchment of immense age, the ink had faded away to a scrawl that was hard to see, even under the fluorescent storeroom lighting.

“This is some fool claiming to know the true meaning of ‘Festina Lente.’ “He said. “My Italian is rusty, but I can read this well enough. The motto was used by numerous Roman emperors, before the Medici adopted it. They go on and on about only the worthy understanding the real meaning.....Yada-Yada.”

The room started to spin as Simon recognised the name of the man who’d just committed the worst crime possible in renaissance Italy. The fool had just put in writing the biggest and most dangerous secret.....

“Are you alright Simon ?” Asked Clara.

“Read it, read it.”

“My Italian is almost non-existent.”

“The name, you can read the name of the fool who wrote this.”

Clara took the note under the lights and squinted at it.

“Piero Rossi.” She Said. “He signed this.”

“I signed it, I am Piero Rossi, and may all the Gods curse me. It was my given name at birth. I was only just turned by Giovanni when I wrote that note. Over seven hundred years ago now, and the contents are still dangerous. I was the fool.....”

“I can’t quite make out the.....”

He took the parchment away from Clara, shoving it into the pocket of his jeans.

“No, not until I’ve had a chance to explain Clara, not until then.” He said.

Clara looked at Judith, who was sat smiling in the chair.

"We'll take the eight Couzinier crates." Said Clara.

"A wise choice I think." Said Judith.

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Akiva Yatsko loved the night. He could hide in shadows on the brightest of days, but the darkness of night gave him something close to invisibility. The early hours of the morning and the American Colony Hotel was quiet, but not completely silent. A guest was watching TV with the sound up a bit loud, though only Akiva was likely to have heard it. A member of the hotel staff walked past only a few feet away, yet never noticed him. He envied Laura her vampire strength and speed, but he was better when it came to moving unseen and unheard.

"Something's going on in the city tonight."

One passing uniformed member of staff said to another.

"Just the dogs.... When one starts howling, they all join in."

Akiva knew something had caused the disturbance in the business district, which had spread throughout the city. Not just dogs.....Cats, birds, even a few rats had come up out the sewers in a panic. Panic caused by what though ? There was something in Jerusalem that night, a nasty, angry something. It was none of his business though and the angry presence was likely to be gone by morning. Akiva walked past the reception desk as the night manager turned to use the phone.

"I'm sorry, we've no idea what has upset the local dogs. I'm sure they'll soon settle down."

Through reception and into the courtyard where Laura and her companion had their room. He had no wish to disturb Laura, or upset her human partner. They were having sex, he could hear the tell-tale sounds. As he walked closer to their room, he could even pick up the odour, the tang of sexual activity. There was a lot of sex being enjoyed in the hotel, he could feel the energy, he could almost taste it. It seemed the animals weren't the only ones to be affected by whatever was loose in the city that night. Doors were open, the courtyard should have been safe from night visitors like him.

"..... Again Gerald.....What has gotten into you ? Not that I'm complaining."

Laura would know he was there, she'd feel his presence once her mind wasn't full of sexual needs and desires. He ignored Gerald and the lady in his life and looked for a place to wait. A planter with a lush looking cycad caught his eye. Akiva sat on the edge of the concrete planter and leaned back into the tough, brittle foliage. It was uncomfortable and likely to be full of bugs, but he'd waited for hours in far worse place. Half an hour later, the courtyard door to Laura's room opened. Dressed in just a man's shirt, she walked right up to him.

"Perfect.....I knew you'd have to show up." She said.

"I'm not your enemy Laura Selway. I've been commanded, sent to help you. It seems we're to be tested to see if we're truly worthy."

"I started thing about that and it's crap. Horus would never go to all that trouble if he thought we were inferior in some way. He might be messing with you head of course, but I'm not falling for it. I'm already worthy enough Akiva."

"If believing that comforts you, then so be it."

"Yeah.... Whatever ! My first task is to recover the bodies of Walter and Emily Couzinier, a couple of dead tomb robbers. You're welcome to come, if you want to ? It'll be easier bagging them up and their gear with two of us."

"I will help you; it's why I'm here. Do you know where they are ?"

"Oh, I've been there and seen their bodies. They're deep below Luxor, in a cave system below the Temple of Thoth at Qasr el-Aguz. It's a little off the main tourist routes."

She tapped her side gently, as if afraid to hit a painful spot. Akiva was beginning to like Laura Selway, or at least understand what made her tick.

“I still have the Egg of Astaroth rubbing up against my ribs.” She said. “Getting in and out of the caves should be easy.....But. When things look as though they’ll be easy, often they aren’t. So come with weapons, lots of weapons.”

Yes, he was definitely beginning to like her.

“When do we go ?” He asked.

“Hmmm..... Tomorrow I’m helping Simon and Clara with something and doing a bit of touristy stuff with my boyfriend. The day after is..... Perfect, it’s Saturday. Give me time to get a shower and breakfast, then come into reception. Ask for me, just like a normal, respectable person.”

He gave her a slight blow.

“It shall be as you wish, I’ll be here.” He said.

“I’m beginning to like you already Akiva.”

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