

## Quid Pro Quo

(Season three of London's Night Stalkers)

### Chapter 5 – Keeper of the Final Gate

**“Patricia Millicent Smart, better known as Patsy, had just arrived home after day release for what her boss called car parts college. It was a long day with late lectures. All she wanted to do was eat the pie and chips she’d just bought and watch an hour of TV.”**

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First of all Gwen had simply refused to let Jack go to London. Not being able to explain everything properly hadn't helped. Obvious questions like 'how will you get there,' and 'where will you stay,' needed to be pondered on. Pondering on things had just wound up Gwen to the point of hysteria. Telling her their travel and accommodation plans were secret, definitely hadn't helped.

“You must be crazy.....The pair of you.” She'd yelled at them. “No.....I'm not letting Jack go anywhere until I know he's going to be safe.”

“Mum needs to know.” Jack had said.

Vampires and a Gudara from the realm of dreams had seemed a bit too much to tell her all in one go. Gwen wasn't stupid, she'd already picked up that like the guy in Twilight, Daniel wasn't just another ordinary man. Telling her he was taking Jack to London by supernatural means, hadn't shocked her as much as he'd expected.

“Hmmm something to do with Laura, I might have guessed.” She'd told him. “Still.... Probably safer than flying. Just..... Call me as soon as you're both settled in.”

Easy as that in the end and he hadn't told her any lies. He'd been a little economical with the truth, though wasn't everyone if the situation called for it? One day he would tell Gwen the full, unabridged truth. Not yet though, definitely not yet. She hadn't even insisted on being there, in the pig shed when the Gudara had returned.

“I feel giddy and a little sick.” Said Jack.

“Me too, I think we should have closed our eyes.”

The journey in the grasp of Laura's Gudara hadn't been instant. There had been something that looked and felt like flying over a forest in the dark. Temple rooms after that, definitely a succession of temple room with a tinge of gold in the air. It felt like it had taken an hour for them to arrive in North London, though his watch told him they'd left Scotland only a minute before. They were stood, bags in hands, in the lounge of the house in Hornsey.

“Are you guys hungry? Where are my manners.... Put your bags down and make yourself at home.”

Patsy was stood in the kitchen doorway, smiling at them. Despite the slightly unreal feel of it all, Daniel thought he could get used to supernatural means of travel. No checking in hours before the flight, no taxi journeys and it had to be safer than hours on a plane. Best of all, it hadn't dug a huge hole in his bank balance.

“We had dinner not long before leaving. I'd love a drink though, tea not coffee.” Said Daniel.

“I'm hungry.” Said Jack.

“He's always hungry.”

“I was going to make a bacon sandwich anyway.....”

“Alright Patsy, you twisted my arm.”

Jack was almost jumping up and down with joy. The boy had a crush on Laura and thought Simon and Clara were the coolest people on the planet. A bacon sandwich in their kitchen had to be his equivalent of a trip to Lourdes.

"Sit.... Sit the pair of you." Said Patsy. "I spoke to Simon after you called, so they know you're here. I was told that Jack can have Laura's room and you can have the spare room at the top of the house. Now.....Do you both want brown sauce ?"

"Yes please." Said Jack.

"Me too." Said Daniel.

It really did feel as though the journey had taken longer than his watch wanted to admit. Daniel felt a little tired and dehydrated. After his second sandwich and third cup of tea, he was beginning to feel like his old self again. He handed his phone to Jack.

"Call your mum and tell her you're fine. Remember to pass the phone to me when you've spoken to her."

Of course Gwen would want to talk to him for ages, as though she hadn't seen the boy in weeks, maybe months. It was what mums did. Daniel took the opportunity to take Patsy out into the hallway.

"Did you talk to Liz Grant ? Is it all arranged ?" He asked.

"Yes, she'll be here at about nine. Brendan will be coming with her. She didn't sound surprised that you were coming to London to help her in some way."

"I'm glad you're here Patsy. Jack doesn't know Liz or Brendan at all."

"Simon told me to give all the help I could Daniel. He also told me to leave if things started to look a bit too weird. His words, he really did say too weird."

"I can understand that. All we need is for the Gudara to make an unscheduled appearance."

"He's alright, once you get over the whole nakedness thing. He held my hand and.....I'm sure that underneath all the teeth and claws, he's on our side."

"Tell me Patsy, I can't tell anymore....What is our side ?" Asked Daniel.

She shrugged at him, actually shrugged.

"To be honest, I don't know anymore."

"Mum wants you." Said Jack.

There he was, he had an ability to move quietly that would have impressed a ninja. Daniel took the phone from Jack. As he listened for Gwen at the other end, he heard Jack telling Patsy that Liz needed to be connected. It was something he'd said quite a few times, even mentioning it to his mum. If asked to explain the boy just shrugged, in a way that was becoming quite annoying.

"Daniel ?"

"Yes, I'm here Gwen..... Sorry I was daydreaming."

"I hope you're going to feed my boy properly..... You can't give him bacon sandwiches for every meal."

"We've only just arrived...."

Daniel looked at Patsy and winked at her.

"But no.....Of course I won't be filling the lad up with bacon sandwiches."

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One huge advantage with using the Egg of Astaroth to gain access to where Walter and Emily Couzinier had lain for decades, was not having to worry about walking past tourists. No having to avoid the gaze of the police either, the egg would take them both to exactly the right spot. Unless there were complications, it would bring them back too. Names for ancient artefacts were often

eccentric, weird and gave no real indication of how the object looked, or what it did. The Egg wasn't an Egg, it was a small silver disc of metal. Probably created by Thoth, though the Psochic scholars could never agree on that. It had certainly been created by one of the Ancient Gods of Egypt.

"I wish I'd thought of a way to bring my guns." Said Laura.

"You could always use the Egg to go home and get them." Said Akiva

The Egg that was really a disc, had burned its way through her skin and then her flesh. Quite a while ago of course, the wounds had healed to become just a few unsightly scars below her left breast. By pressing her hand against it and calling upon the power of the Old Gods, it was possible to enter the Abyss. Once in the Abyss, it was possible to travel to anywhere. The metal circle nestled up against her ribs, was effectively a gateway to anywhere.

"I already know the location of your lair." Said Akiva. "You have my word that I'd never tell anyone else, or steal from you."

It was partly that and that going home was, going home. Going back would make it tempting to go back every few days, perhaps going for a drink and a pizza with Patsy. More goodbyes, more feelings of leaving home that she didn't want or need.

"No, I'll make do with the weapons you've provided." She said.

They both looked like characters from a samurai movie. Laura had three blades strapped to her back and a dagger on her belt. All the weapons were far better quality than she could have acquired quickly and in a strange city. Akiva was similarly armed. The only things ruining the feel of ancient warriors with blades, were the caving helmets they wore, complete with bright LED lamps.

"There's water in the backpacks and a few things to eat on the move." Said Akiva. "We've each got a set of spare batteries for the lamps."

"Did you pack body bags?" She asked.

"Yes, of course."

"Thank you, I wouldn't have been this well prepared without your help."

"A last present Laura Selway, in case we run into anything needing such a solution."

They were in an empty apartment in Ramat Eshkol, in Eastern Jerusalem. It appeared that Akiva was quite good at finding empty residences and considered them to be safer than hotels and of course, far cheaper. He'd just handed her a modern automatic pistol and two spare clips. Not a Glock, but the weapon looked new and best of all, the grip fitted her hand.

"Thank you.....I now feel properly dressed. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Hold me tight, get a good grip on my clothing." Said Laura.

She was getting better at it all the time. A quick press with her left hand and a tiny amount of pain from her injured ribs. Once the pain had been debilitating. The room span a little, before melting away completely. No good telling him the nausea would go away if he closed his eyes, there was no air to hold her voice, no proper movement of time in which to speak. The Abyss didn't obey the usual rules of the universe.

Laura felt resistance to their movement, as she became aware of the golden aura surrounding them. Forward, backward, the terms were meaningless, yet she knew they were frozen, stationary in whatever time there was in the Abyss. A floor below, about twenty feet below their feet. An act of pure faith and intuition, as Laura let go of Akiva and dropped to the floor below.

"I knew you were clever Laura. Perhaps sometimes too clever."

Akiva was gone, everything changed. She was in somewhere that looked vaguely familiar. A throne room with many thrones, though only one was being used. Still the golden tinge to everything,

always the golden tinge. Horus was sitting on his throne, beckoning her forward. As before, there seemed to be other creatures surrounding her, perhaps other Gods. Diffuse and unclear out of the corner of her eyes, they vanished completely when looked at directly.

"I have come to fulfil my duty, to repay the debt for everything you have given." She said. "Many appreciate the gift of life to Brendan Roche. He was and still is, a good man."

Horus turned his bird like head towards her. Horus the God of the sky, most significant of all the Ancient Gods. He had many forms, yet on his throne he'd always had the body of a man, with the head of a falcon. He lifted a staff, pointing to something behind her.

"Do you believe what....That one told you?"

Laura turned and saw Akiva. Still frozen in time and now in a cage of golden bars. Gold of course, everything in the realm of Horus was always gold.

"No I didn't." She said. "You would never have wasted so much time on anyone who was unworthy."

Did the Gods laugh? It sounded like laughter and for just a moment, the man on the throne had a human head. Annoying, like so much else when in the world where everything was tinged with gold. When she looked directly at him, the eyes of a falcon looked back at her.

"Walter and Emily will tell you what is required, once you've recovered their remains. For now I will grant you freedom from Akiva Yatsko, if you wish it? I will remove him from your life. You are worthy of carrying out my requests on your own, more than worthy."

Horus didn't like to be asked to clarify what he said. She'd tried it once and he'd become quite agitated. Laura decided to assume that removed meant dead. Did she want rid of the annoyance who'd been dogging her footsteps for so long? The obvious answer had to be yes, but her mind always thought about things differently in the realm of the Gods.

"No, I will keep Akiva with me." She said.

"Very well, though I am going to restore your ability to seriously harm each other. The next time you fight, one of you will die. Just make sure it's not you Laura Selway."

Laura was learning to avoid the visual confusion, when the aura of gold began to fade. She closed her eyes and kept them closed, until she felt Akiva fumbling about in the dark.

"Your light.....Put your light on." She said.

Her eyes adjusted to the bright LED lights faster than his, another plus for team vampire. Akiva was leaning on the cave wall, vomiting.

"I know we went somewhere." He said. "I feel as though I was stuck somewhere....What happened Laura?"

There were no rules of chivalry for vampires, no code of combat. She now knew a sword in the back would kill Akiva, but he wouldn't know, not yet at least. It gave her a definite edge.... He had helped her though.

"I had another audience with Horus." She said. "It appears we can now kill each other if we wish."

"He loves playing with us.....Anything else?"

"No."

Poor Akiva, he didn't look too good. More throwing up and he didn't look too steady on his feet. Was it a test, had Horus weakened him to see what she'd do? Laura decided to take everything at face value and assume Akiva hadn't handled travelling though the Abyss that well.

"Where are we?" He asked.

"See the mark carved into the wall? Mabina did that with a climbing axe. The bodies of the Couziniers are at the end of that passage. If we go down the incline to the wider cave, we'll

eventually reach a huge underground chamber. There's an aspect of Thoth there, a huge angry brute of a thing. Simian, like a massive ape. It's unkillable, though it nearly killed me before I realised that." "And back the other way?" Asked Akiva.

"Blocked off after a serpent brought down the end of the passage. A serpent large enough to swallow both of us in one gulp. For all I know it still inhabits the chamber beyond the cave in. Then there are the feral baboons....."

"You've led an exciting life Laura."

"Come on, the bodies aren't that far. The dry heat has mummified them."

Memory could do that, it played tricks. It had felt as though Mabina and her had only taken a few paces that day. They were worried about being pursued though. It took fifteen minutes to reach the end of the passage. The bodies looked exactly the same as they'd probably looked for years.

"Thirst got them, not a good way to die." Said Laura.

"There are many worse ones."

Laura wasn't about to argue with him. Clara had told her about a vampire who'd killed a priest on holy ground, and had the stupidity to feed on him. Ludmilla the vampire had been called, a tall wild woman from Prague. Simon had been there, though Clara hadn't let him tell her the story until she'd been a vampire for a while. Poor Ludmilla! That kind of death was almost unknown. Putrefaction of bodily tissues, while the victim is still alive for most of it. Yes, there were far worse ways to die than thirst.

"We didn't disturb the bodies, apart from looking for ID." Said Laura. "If you can keep your light on them, I'll get them into body bags. Shouldn't be too bad....Anything gooey will have dried out years ago."

"The smell is still there. I think the stench of death must last forever."

"Hmmm."

Probably fit and well-muscled in life, tomb robbers had to be fit. Now Walter and Emily weighed next to nothing. Laura put them in separate body bags, though they'd have fitted into one. Respect for the dead definitely mattered more when you'd actually had conversations with the dearly departed.

"That was easier than I thought." Said Laura.

Laura lifted the body bags, placing them behind her. Something fell over as she disturbed a few stones with her foot.

"Looks like they buried something before they died." She said.

"An old leather satchel by the look of it."

"I'll give it a shake and a quick look." She said. "No point in taking a bag of rocks with us."

A shake told her the satchel was quite heavy, with a few metal things inside that clanked together. The clasp still worked. Two compartments with something she wasn't surprised to find in the rear compartment.

"They had to have one of these.....Almost compulsory in their line of work. It'll probably work once it's had a good clean and a little gun oil."

The gun in her hand was an old heavy revolver, which had probably been de rigueur at the period Walter and Emily had been illegally acquiring Egyptian treasures. There were bullets in the satchel too, lots of loose bullets.

"There's a notebook too.....We might as well take the satchel." She said. "The Couziniers might be glad to see it again. Come on.....Put Walter over your shoulder and get a good tight hold of my arm."

"So....No quick look at the serpent?"

"We'll come back.....It can be your birthday treat."

Difficult to put pressure on the disc in her side and hold onto anything. It took a few tries and Laura thought they might have to make two trips. As she was almost resigned to dropping Emily on the floor, the walls of the passage began to fade.

“Close your eyes, it’ll help ease the nausea.” She said.

A gold mist, but no diversion to anywhere in the realm of the Gods. The destination didn’t look right, though she didn’t usually see where the Egg was taking her. A landing in slow motion, the group of men in the trees didn’t look to be moving at all. They’d been diverted to the outside of her secret lair, though it was obviously no longer that secret. Night with a slight hint of dawn in the east.

“This doesn’t look good.....There are a lot of them.” She said.

Even worse odds if Akiva didn’t wake up, he seemed frozen in time again. Overheard words as they slowly came closer to the ground, one of the men talking to a man in a very expensive looking suit.

“It would take hours to search the inside sir.....She has a real home from home in there, even a chesterfield sofa.....”

Diverted by Horus probably, given an opportunity to defend her lair and the personal items it contained. Her guns were the most precious items, especially the sniper rifles. Everything was hidden, placed under floorboards, or niches in walls.

“.....leave a surprise too.....Something large enough to remove a limb. And.....”

The flow of words stopped as Laura stepped onto the grass. Colours brightened as reality seemed to become solid again and obeying all the usual rules. Laura held a long blade and as she stepped forward, she used it. The man in the suit who’d wanted to leave a trap, was the first to feel her anger. Anger made her thrust harder than was needed, the blade went right through him. A precious second was wasted pulling her blade out of his chest.

“Akiva, wake up.” She yelled.

No sign of him and no time to look. Laura was lucky, the bullet missed her by a tiny fraction of an inch, the muzzle gases burning the skin on her cheek. No clever words, no gloating as she sliced off the man’s gun hand. There were still seven living gunmen and it was far too early to assume she was going to survive. If there were clever words, they would come later.

“Fuck.....It’s one of them.....A vampire.” Someone yelled.

Anything to panic and scare the enemy was good and one of the men was looking behind him, as though expecting her to have reinforcements.

“Simon.....Take care of their car.” Shouted Laura.

Bluff of course, though it might just rattle them a little, whoever they were. Her guess was an attack by the Silver Dawn, though that wasn’t certain. She stepped round a man, using the edge of her blade to cut his throat. No time to feed, but the next man felt her fangs. The neurotoxin in her bite paralysed in seconds, turning an enemy fighter into a harmless heap on the ground.

“Will someone..... Shoot the fucking bitch.”

They were getting angry, though she did notice two of them running away in the direction of the car park. The odds were now down to about four bad guys to one....Her. Two of them lifted their guns at the same time, not getting shot was going to be difficult.

“At last.” She muttered.

Akiva was there, ramming his blade into the side of one of the gunmen, twisting it as he pushed. The second man he almost cut in two, slicing him from neck to abdomen. The remaining men had obviously had enough and joined their friends who were running towards the car park. Laura knelt next to body of the man in the expensive suit, going through his pockets.

“Are we going after them ?” Asked Akiva.

“Hmmmmm I think not.... Cornered rats and all that. You can help me carry all my stuff if you like, this place is now about as private as King’s Cross Station.”

Success, the dead man had a wallet in his trouser pocket. Good fighters never take personal ID into battle, but the guy in the suit probably hadn’t expected to be directly involved in any fighting.

“A Monseigneur no less, we’ve killed someone important.” She said. “Monseigneur Gérard Mazières, who is a Silver Dawn boss, I’m certain of it.”

“He was Laura, one of the big bosses. I’ve worked for him, quite a few times.”

She put the wallet in her pocket and moved to the next dead body.

“Come on, help me. I want every ID we can find.....Knowledge is power Akiva, knowledge is power.”

“Then what do we do ? We’re supposed to be in Jerusalem.”

“And we will be, quite soon. Is your borrowed apartment secure ?”

“Yes, no one bothers anyone in Ramat Eshkol, it’s that kind of place.”

“Good, we can take my stuff there.... We’ll start with the chesterfield sofa.”

Liz Grant hadn’t been surprised that Daniel wanted to see her. She hadn’t been feeling right for quite a while. Not just the disgusting mess she sometimes peed into the loo, occasionally there was unpleasant vomit too. She was strong, stronger than she’d ever felt in her entire life. Not quite right though, that was how she felt in herself.

“Come in, I just ordered enough pizza to feed an army.” Said Patsy.

“We didn’t come empty handed.” Said Brendan.

He handed over a bottle of fairly decent wine and a large chocolate cake Liz had bought earlier in the day. Her new job was boring, but they didn’t seem to mind her taking long lunches.

“The others are in the lounge.” Said Patsy. “Introduce yourselves, or something, while I put these in the fridge.”

There was no TV going in the lounge, though a radio was quietly playing a talk radio station. Liz had met Daniel, but Jack was someone new. She’d heard he was a little ‘special’ in that dreadful new meaning of the word. When she saw him, something clicked into place. Perhaps he was some sort of savant ? There was a feeling of something not quite right about Jack, which seemed to dovetail into her own feeling of being not quite right. She now understood why the boy had been invited.

“Daniel..... How are things in Pitmedden ?” She asked.

“Fine, fine.... Gwen would have come, but with the animals to look after.....”

Patsy was back, with an obvious determination to make the evening a success. A success at precisely what, had yet to be revealed.

“We have wine, coffee....Or I can make tea. Who’d like what ?” She asked. “And there’s some diet coke, which I’m told is Jack’s favourite.”

“Wine for me.....A bucket full, it’s been one of those days.” Said Liz.

Everyone chose wine, apart from Jack. He seemed thrilled with a glass of diet coke. There were nibbles too, a coffee table full of them.

“You’re really looking after us Patsy.” Said Brendan.

“My orders are to look after you all.....But to run away if things look too weird.”

That was good, it broke the ice. Everyone laughed and even Patsy laughed at her own joke.

“Orders !..... We’re not at war Patsy.” Said Liz.

“We are, the Silver Dawn people are becoming a bit of a nightmare.” Said Patsy. “Laura has been fighting a running battle with them for ages.”

“I’d heard a few things, but.....Did you know about this Brendan ?” Asked Liz.

"Forgive me.....Yes, I knew. You had your own problems and Laura thought it was better not to upset you. If it helps, she seems to view you as our ultimate weapon. Best kept safe in case of need."

"You make me sound like a Doomsday weapon."

"Is that a bad thing?" Asked Patsy.

"Maybe not.....I would still have preferred to have known what was going on."

The arrival of the pizza stopped the situation becoming heated and then of course there was more wine, followed by the excellent chocolate cake. Jack still hadn't said much, considering it seemed to have been his idea to come to North London.

"Do you like the cake Jack?" She asked.

"It's..... Wonderful."

There it was again, the feeling of something not quite right, that sort of matched her own feelings.

Liz took hold of Jack's chocolate and crumb covered hand and held it in her own.

"You know who I am, don't you Jack?"

"Of course I do, you're Liz."

"I mean really know, who I really am?"

"You're still Liz..... You're also the Unnamed, the Keeper of the final gate into the underworld.

Anubis blesses you and grants you his protection. You can never die....Unless you choose to."

They were getting somewhere. Liz heard a gasp from Patsy and Daniel had gone very pale.

"He's never said anything like that before." Said Daniel.

"Immortal and blessed by a God." Said Patsy. "No wonder Laura thinks you're a Doomsday weapon."

"So Jack..... Why did you want to see me?" Asked Liz.

"Not me, I need to take you to see someone. Laura thought the battle was caused by her, but it wasn't her. It was you.....She should have left you to be destroyed in Mordaunt's bubble universe. Everything would have been alright then."

"Apologise Jack.... This instant." Said Daniel. "I'm so sorry Liz, he's never normally rude, ever."

"It's alright, let him talk.... You know what's done can't be undone, don't you Jack? It might have been better if I'd ceased to exist, but I didn't. Where do you want to take me?"

"To the dream world, you need to see Wiremi. He has other names, though Laura always knew him as Wiremi, the Seer."

Gasps as a tiny yellow flower appeared in Jack's hand. He offered it to her.

"It will help." Said Jack.

The tiny yellow bloom appeared to melt into the palm of her hand. She instantly felt better, without knowing exactly why.

"Thank you Jack." She said. "For the first time in weeks, I don't feel slightly nauseous."

"You need to become connected."

"To what?"

"You will see. We should go now."

"I can't just drop everything and go. Will we be gone for long?" She asked.

Poor Jack, his brow furrowed, as he obviously tried to concentrate.

"No good asking me to explain." He said. "A long time there is a short time here. Time there doesn't really matter, but we must hurry. It is all..... Hard for me to explain."

"We understand that lad, just do your best." Said Daniel.

"We need to go Liz, go now."

"Do I need spare clothes?"

"You already have everything you need."

“That doesn’t make sense Jack, I’m not even wearing shoes. I left them at the front door.”

Blueish grey eyes he had, she’d never really noticed that before. He put his hands out for her to hold and there were still traces of chocolate cake on his fingers. It was insane, yet she trusted him as she held his hands.

“Alright Jack, let’s go.”

“Are you sure.....”

Whatever Daniel had intended to say, it was too late. Laura had always needed to enter the realm of dreams while asleep, which made perfect sense. Liz found herself flying high above a desert of golden sand, with Jack holding her hand. It was daylight, though the weather looked stormy. A battle of a kind was being fought by forces she couldn’t comprehend.

“We should fly higher.” Said Jack.

“How ?”

“You know how.”

The amazing thing was that she did know how. By thinking about going up, they both flew higher. With her new skill came the realisation that she was holding Jack up, rather than the other way around. She moved closer and interlocked her fingers in his. Liz looked at the battle below her.

“Is that my doing ?” She asked.

“No, but you’re causing one side to gain the upper hand.”

“Which side ?”

“That is....Unimportant. The battle will go on, it has always gone on. If one side wins though.....It will be the end of everything.”

Crap.... Thanks Jack, no pressure or anything. Below them the angry waves of a bright blue ocean, met the red hot sand of a desert that seemed to stretch on forever into the distance. Sand so hot that flames occasionally moved over the surface. Where ocean met sand, it was chaos.

“I understand.....But not everything.” She said.

“Wiremi will help you understand.”

Where the ocean hit the sand, everything below was super-heated steam and the sound of sand being cracked by the sudden coolness of the ocean. A natural erosion that was anything but natural. An ocean and a vast desert that were merely an illusion for her benefit. The war was real though, even if the powers waging it were completely beyond her comprehension. If one side won.....No, that was unthinkable.

“Do you understand what we’re looking at Jack ?” She asked.

“Yes, the world is fighting to exist.”

It was a ludicrous answer that was wrong in just about every way. It was also the perfect answer to the endless war being fought below them.

“A perfect answer Jack.”

“We need go to higher, much higher. Wiremi is waiting for us.”

Liz thought about up and they went up. She thought about up with some speed, and the battle below them began to become a dot in the distance. It felt like being in a long chimney, which didn’t seem to lead anywhere.

“Higher..... Faster Liz.” Yelled the boy.

They popped out into a fairly normal looking world. Laura talked about Wiremi living in a forest of almost perpetual night. It was daylight though, a nice sunny day with just a few cotton wool clouds in the sky.

“It’s beautiful.” Said Jack.

“Yes, it is.”

No control over where they were going. By experimenting Liz realised she could control their height. “Hold on, I’m going lower.” She said.

The forest filled everywhere, every scrap of available land. Only one thing had cut through the landscape, replacing shades of green, with the glint of sunlight on water. A river was below them, a fast running river with rapids. Down they went, until the blooms among the trees became visible. Reds, blues, yellows, even a few flowers with dark black petals.

“This is amazing.” Said Jack, reaching for a flower.

“Be careful.”

No good, his fingers left hers and Jack was sent hurtling towards the ground. Liz wasn’t even worried, knowing she could catch him before he hit the ground. They tumbled through vines after she caught him, vines full of glorious white flowers.

“Keep still Jack..... You’re too heav.....”

They hit the ground together, hard enough to cause a few bruises. Even that was fun. They both stood up, covered in leaves and a multitude of different blooms.

“Idiot.” She said, laughing.

By some miracle they’d landed where they needed to be, or perhaps it was no miracle at all. Maybe wherever you touched ground in the realm of dreams was always the right place. They weren’t that far from the great tree Laura had described to her.

“Is that ?” Asked Jack.

“Has to be.”

The almost naked man with a beard wasn’t human, or at least not all human. He smiled at her and Liz knew who he was, before he introduced himself.

“Liz, I’m so glad you came..... My name is Wiremi, the Seer.”

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Nathalie Aurigny had her own cottage within walking distance of The Chateau. Even on cold rainy mornings the walk wasn’t long enough to be unpleasant. No cars or drivers needed, or the usual trappings that might bring her and the chateau to anyone’s attention. At forty three she was the youngest ever head of The Order of the Silver Dawn, and only the second woman to hold the post. Her assistant had developed a bad habit. He’d started calling her while she was walking to work. It was her thinking time and she resented any interruptions.

“We’ll talk once I’m in the building David.” She snapped. “Yes, the situation in England is a disaster. It will still be a disaster in ten minutes time, when I’m sat at my desk.”

Nathalie, known as Natt to her friends, hung up while David Huynh was still building up to full panic mode. Her assistant was good, probably the best she’d ever had. He just had to learn that certain parts of her day were almost sacred and never to be disturbed.

“Laura Selway, you’re becoming a serious annoyance.” She muttered. “I don’t know whether I should hire someone to kill you, or offer you a job.”

Natt had effectively paid off enemies before, simply by offering them a huge salary and plenty of perks. The vampire would make a good a head of security and the silver dawn had a healthy bank balance. Wealthy donors and a few prominent business people as members, meant she’d never had to worry about unexpected expenses.

“David will hate her of course.” She mumbled.

The chateau had probably had a proper local name once, though now everyone called it The Chateau. Not far north of Plouharnel in Brittany, The Chateau was at the end of a badly maintained

road and almost lost among the standing stones and Dolmen, which littered the area. Few of the staff who worked for the order, were aware that having a headquarters near the Neolithic monuments, hadn't been an accident.

"Good morning Miss Aurigny."

The woman on the front desk was new and still insisted on calling her Miss Aurigny.

"Nathalie, please call me Nathalie."

David picked up all the general messages that arrived during the night, but anything marked private went into a separate pigeon hole. There were over a dozen urgent messages, all about the death of Gérard Mazières in England. It was Gérard's fault of course, he had no business getting involved with rooting out vampires. That was grunt work and grunt work could be dangerous.

"That's why we employ ex-special forces operatives." She muttered.

"Sorry Miss.....Nathalie."

"Just talking to myself....A bad habit I know."

From the outside The Chateau looked like a well maintained part of the local heritage. A holiday destination, or a health spa. In reality the entire site was guarded by sensors and cameras, linked to a security office which was manned around the clock. There were always at least a dozen heavily armed guards on duty, with another dozen living in a cottage not that far from hers. Security had never been that intense, until Laura and her vampire friends had burned Clufford Hall to the ground. They'd been aided by the Psochic Order, which had caused security to be upped yet again. The Psochics had been a thorn in their flesh for well over a hundred year.

"Good morning David, I hope you brought coffee with you ?"

He had, he always did. There was no way of stopping him from being in her office as she arrived, so she'd insisted on him bringing coffee.

"Every department head is worried." He said.

"I know, I even got a private message from Bernard in archives and he hasn't left the building in the last two years. We employ a lot of neurotics David, it seems to come with the territory."

On some level she viewed David Huynh as a friend. An American who looked as though he'd just arrived from Hong Kong. He had the kind of Kentucky accent, that sounded profound, even if he was just reading a memo from finance.

"We will need to be seen to be doing something Natt."

"Oh we will, we will."

What though ? She'd been thinking about it since climbing out of bed at around five in the morning. She had a long term plan, but there did need to be something immediate. There were a lot of worried people like Bernard in archives, and they needed to feel protected.

"Get London office to burn out Laura's lair." She said. "Something massive that will make the local news, maybe even the nationals. Lots of noise and fire..... Yes, plenty of fire. She'll be long gone of course, along with her possessions."

"Perfect Natt, just what everyone needs right now. Mysterious and intense fire in grounds of stately home.....I can see the headlines now."

"Alright..... Get it organised and then you can begin working on my real plan. We're going to try and hire Laura Selway as our new head of security."

Sometimes she loved to see David in a real jaw drop moment.

"What about Bertrand ?"

"There have been too many failures. An example will be made of Bertrand. I will deal with that, personally. Our staff need to know that we reward success, but we also punish failure."

Poor David, he looked as though she'd just asked him to pick up an angry Black Mamba.

"How would we.....How do I go about even contacting her... This vampire ?" He asked.

"I can help you with that.....I still have a few friends in the right places."

She took the picture out of her drawer and pushed it across the desk at him.

"This is Patsy Smart, her phone number and address are on the back. Patsy is one of the family at the house in Hornsey. Amazing really, as she's having an open affair with Simon. Go to London and talk to her..... Use your charm. She's a full cherish though, definitely not to be harmed in any way."

"You want me to go to London ?"

"Oh poor Baby, your face. Yes, I know I can trust you to get it done without using violence. I need a sit down talk with Laura Selway in a neutral public location. Get everything organised for the destruction of the lair and then I want you on the next plane to London. Choose who you want to take to watch your back.....Not Bertrand of course."

"I'll get it done."

"And don't hurt her, we don't need a full on war with three vampires and something even worse than a vampire."

"Worse than a vampire..... Do you mean the Psochics ?"

"I doubt if they'll give a damn about Ms Smart, or her friends. I mean the player we're still evaluating, the ex-hooker."

"Liz Grant you mean ? The unnamed one or something.... Surely that's all nonsense ?"

He said it with a derisory mirk on his face that angered her. The fool didn't realise, he really had no idea.

"Don't be a complete idiot." She yelled. "Get to London and remember to be very charming and polite when you talk to Patsy Smart."

~ ~

Patricia Millicent Smart, better known as Patsy, had just arrived home after day release for what her boss called car parts college. It was a long day with late lectures. All she wanted to do was eat the pie and chips she'd just bought and watch an hour of TV.

"I'm home mum." She yelled from the door.

"In the kitchen." Shouted Evie, her mum. "Your friend Elena is here, she brought Zeus with her."

She was tired and for all she knew, she might have a friend who was best buddies with a Greek God. Patsy walked into the kitchen, to find Mabina Gladitch enjoying tea and biscuits. A tiny black and white kitten was climbing all over her mum, as she tried to stroke it.

"I know I said I didn't want another. He's so friendly though."

"Best of the litter Patsy, just like I promised." Said Mabina.

To Patsy, Mabina would always be a monster, the centuries old vampire queen who'd once tortured her. The hungry ground in the basement of the house in Chelsea, had worked its wonders on Mabina. Patsy didn't want to admit it, but the old vampire looked only a year or so older than her.

"That is very kind of you." Said Patsy.

Both sides in the collaboration between the Hornsey coterie and Mabina had agreed lists of non-combatants, humans considered untouchable. Patsy knew she was on several lists. It was just that Mabina was..... Mabina. Half mad most of the time and mercilessly brutal all of the time.

"Look at his paws, Zeus will be a big cat one day." Said Mabina.

Patsy wouldn't relax with Mabina in the house and her chips would be getting cold.

"Normally we could get a pizza or something, but I'm so tired."

“No, you can’t be that rude.” Said her mum. “We can call for Chinese food and there’s wine in the fridge. I rarely meet any of your friends these days.”

Mainly because her friends were either vampires or strange creatures who served the Gods of ancient Egypt. Evie didn’t get out much though, so Patsy resigned herself to a couple of hours sharing small talk with Mabina.

“No.....Patsy told me she was going to have a long day today.” Said Mabina. “I must go too, I’ve a few people coming over. Another time..... Definitely another time.”

Her mum was too enthralled with tiny Zeus to put up much of a fight. It was decided that Mabina would go and they’d arrange a meal for another time. Patsy saw Mabina to the door, as though she was a perfectly normal human visitor.

“Thank you for the kitten, mum seems to love him already..... I have to ask. Was this visit a warning of some kind ?”

“No, you have my word dear Patsy. My home is now irrevocably linked to Simon and Clara. Like it or not Patsy, we’re now almost family. I genuinely want us to be friends.”

Friends.....Mabina had nearly killed Simon. If Clara could forgive her though.....

“It might take me a while to get as far as friends, but I will try.” Said Patsy.

“That’s all I ask.”

“Thank you again for Zeus, he’s just what my mum needed.”

Mabina turned to go, then turned back.

“I learned a few things when Laura and I recovered artefacts for the Psochics. Let’s just say that if anyone ever tried to harm you mother.....Zeus might well give them the shock of their life. Once he’s grown of course, once he’s fully grown.”

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