

Quid Pro Quo

(Season three of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 6 - Ramat Eshkol

“The herbs were all labelled, though most of the names meant nothing to her. She worked to his instructions, adding a few pinches to the bowl, sometimes a few leaves. It was all so mundane, that needing to cut her finger for a few drops of blood, made it all seem more authentic.”

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Tim Chance knew he'd gone well beyond beginning to get serious feelings for Laura. Love sounded cheesy, even when he spoke the word silently in his own head. That was what it was about though wasn't it? All the sex and spending time with each other was nature's way of bonding couples together, in the hope that they'd bring up healthy offspring. Not that he wanted to start breeding or anything like that, though he hadn't ruled out kids in his future. Maybe their future.

“Laura, are you awake?” He asked.

She'd come back to the hotel tired, but not too tired for some naked fun over a late snack from room service. He'd started pondering on whether he loved her, when he'd noticed the scar near her left shoulder blade. There was something about Laura's back, he loved fondling it. Love again, that word so over used that it had become almost forbidden when you meant it. Love was a word for someone you'd known for a few months and wanted to make feel appreciated. Love as in soul mate, the reason you kept on breathing, the person who lit up your life..... That meant admitting having genuine feelings. Feelings made you vulnerable, so love if you actually meant it, had become forbidden. He fondled her shoulder blade a little harder.

“Laura, wake up.....You have a scar.” He said.

Tim had come to the conclusion that it wasn't being afraid of commitment that had been the death of so many relationships. It was fear of actually having genuine feelings for another human.

Love....Real love, was uncool.....So It had become forbidden.

“I have quite a few scars Tim.....Go back to sleep.” Said Laura.

The trouble was that he knew all her scars. They were all healed up and many looked to be fading away to nothing. Laura obviously healed well, nearly all her scars looked old, faint and almost gone. She'd once mentioned being hurt and beaten, though he hadn't pushed her for details. The scar on her left shoulder blade was a problem. It hadn't been there the last time he'd fondled her back.

“This scar is new Laura.” He said.

“You're imagining it.”

“No I'm not, this scar wasn't there when we arrived here. I know and love every mark on you Laura Selway, every flaw, every spot, every scar.”

He pulled at her and she turned to face him, their foreheads touching.

“You know what I do for a living Tim. I had a fight with someone. It was no big deal, as you can see, I'm alive and well.”

“Utter and complete bollocks.” He said.

“What did you say?!”

“You have a scar, from what looks like a deep and nasty wound.” He said. “Such a wound would need stitches and take a while to heal. Then it would take a while longer for a scar to form. If you were cut yesterday, you'd still have stitches, a dressing and quite a bit of pain. So your story is bollocks.”

It hurt him that she was lying to him and obviously keeping something secret from him. In the beginning, when it had all been about the sex, he hadn't cared. Now the lies and secrets left their own scars, even if they were invisible.

"I don't understand Tim. What are you suggesting?"

Tim had never realised how dark her eyes were, though there wasn't much light in the hotel room. They'd left the curtains open and a walkway light reached as far as the foot of the bed. Her eyes looked so dark, as though the pupils had widened to take over her entire eye. A new mannerism too, or at least one he'd never noticed before. Laura had her head on one side and for a moment it felt as though a huge angry raptor was examining him. He was determined to tell her how he felt though, even if it did mean she'd dump him.

"So many strange things Laura, so many times I thought I.....Saw something too strange to be real. I suppose I'm asking if anything is wrong. Crap ! No I'm not.....Every bit of me wants to ask..... What are you Laura Selway?"

Again that mannerism, her head on one side, as if studying him. It came without warning, as Laura pulled back from him. Fangs appeared in her upper jaw. It happened so quickly, that it looked too fast to be real, like some kind of magic trick. Long fangs, yellow compared to her usual teeth. A white liquid of some kind was dripping from them. Her voiced seemed different too, deeper in some way. "Someone I know very well, thought I'd feed on you if we had this conversation." She said. "They were worried I'd kill you..... It's not safe to kill someone I've dated. We've been seen together too often, too many people know we're together. To the police I'd be the prime suspect if you vanished.....Creatures like me must always avoid the police. You know what I am now, don't you Tim?"

He did know and it wasn't as much of a shock as it should have been. Things he'd half seen and half heard, now made perfect sense.

"Yes, you're a vampire. I don't care, I still love you Laura."

The fangs vanished and once again, her forehead touched his.

"I'm not sure what love is Tim. I was never completely human, even before I was turned into one of the Nosferatu, a creature of the night. There were people I was supposed to love, like my parents and the relatives who turned up at Christmas. I became good at faking emotions I suppose. I would never harm you Tim, I'd.....It would be impossible. If I think about you not being here it hurts me.... Inside. Worse than hurts, I'd be devastated. I know it's not romantic love, but is that enough for you Tim?"

"Of course it is. How long have you been....."

Her finger moved faster than he'd have thought possible, before being pushed against his lips.

"I want to tell you everything." She said. "It doesn't just affect me though, there are others I will need to ask for permission. For now you'll need to be patient."

Laura rolled over, showing him the scar on her back that had caused all the trouble.

"I quite like being fondled Tim..... Fondle my back until I fall asleep."

So many questions he wanted to ask, yet one kept troubling him, really troubling him.

"You said you were never completely human."

"Be patient Tim.....Be patient."

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Veronica Neophytou, known to everyone as Ronnie, had borrowed Simon's office while he was away. Not officially borrowed, as in ask him if it was alright, but borrowed as in her moving her stuff

in there about an hour after his plane had taken off. Anthony had his usual blinkered vision about everything.

“Sit on the roof if you like.” He’d told her. “Anywhere you like, as long as you meet your sales target at the end of the month.”

Anthony Jordan was huge, black and behaved like the boss at just about every sales job she’d had. He liked to yell at people and rumour had it, that he’d once sacked a guy he’d caught reading the job adverts in the newspaper. Anthony was driven, which was a nice way of saying he was a bastard who liked to see fear in sales people’s eyes. But, as Ronnie looked likely to earn over seventy thousand in commission by the end of the year, she wasn’t complaining.

“Wow, your stapler is far nicer than mine Simon.” She muttered.

Delving through the drawers in his desk was still fun, especially as she’d found a key that opened the one he’d locked. Anthony would sack her for going through his stuff. Simon would just yell at her for a while. That was the crucial difference between them. Sales teams are usually good at rumours; some of them are even occasionally accurate. Rumour had it that Anthony had run short on funds and Simon had bought half the business. It was the sort of rumour Ronnie wanted to be true, even if it wasn’t.

“You do have a lot of nice crap in your drawers.”

A CD Walkman, he still had one of those and a Dictaphone with the tiny tapes. It was like a techie nerds dream in his drawers. Some of it was so old it was valuable again. Not that she’d push her luck by stealing any of it. The phone rang, putting her into a half hour conversation with Mrs Florence Anderson from Harwich.

“Florence, so glad you called. Did you look at our home equity release plan ?”

Ronnie was young, but liked old school record keeping. She wrote everything into a large desk diary. In went Florence Anderson, with two ticks next to her name. Ronnie knew that Florence would be a signed up client by the end of the month. She was good at her job, no staying in the office until nine on Friday night for her. Being good at her job left her time for the things every sales person loves, like going through the boss’s personal stuff.

“So..... Simon Atherton. Why have you kept a cheapo diary from nineteen ninety five ?”

It had been jammed right at the back of the locked drawer. The sort of diary people buy from the local convenience store, because it might be useful. The sort of diary that gets thrown away unused, by spring. To Ronnie the old yellowing paper meant one thing; the opportunity to poach a few decent clients.

“Cyril’s Petit Champignon, I’ve heard of them. And you’ve got the home phone number of the Managing Director.”

The diary looked old, but the ink looked new. There were numbers underneath the name of Cyril H Carter and one of them was dated only three months previously. Ronnie copied the name and phone number into her own diary.

“Hayle’s Motor Factors..... No way. I once spent three weeks trying to sell them an office printer. A right gang of no hoppers.”

In another incarnation of course, sales people tended to move around quite a lot. Ronnie copied any numbers and names that looked current. Everything could be useful, every number was a potential hot lead. Ronnie called it intuition, but she had no real idea why one name in Simon’s old diary grabbed her attention and refused to let go.

“Tom Ives.....Why so many notes for a car breakers yard Simon ?”

They weren't on the client list, Ronnie carried a copy everywhere with her. Anthony and Simon had other ventures though and even a few off the books clients. Everyone seemed to have those since the banking crisis, a few clients who liked to pay cash.

"If he's not on the list, you can't say I tried to poach him."

Ronnie thought she was better at upselling than Simon, always had and there were numbers next to Tom's name. It looked like Simon was bringing in fifty thousand a month from the car breakers in Erith. Next step, she Googled Tom and his enterprise.

"Christ ! We're in the wrong game." She muttered.

Tom's business had won lots of awards, including several from the local council for being pioneers in recycling. The local paper seemed to think Tom was the local equivalent of Elon Musk. The biggest thing to interest Ronnie was that Tom supported quite a few local good causes and a few national charities.

"Which all means you've got money to spend. I think we're going to be friends Mr Ives."

After a careful phone call to arrange an interview of course. Ronnie was good at getting people to see her, she prided herself on reading people as they talked. She dialled Tom's number on her own cellphone.

"Mr Ives, you must know Simon Atherton is away." She said. "My name is Ronnie. He asked me to look after you in his absence. Think of this as a courtesy call.....Is there anything you need ?"

Noises of machinery quite close to him and what sounded like seagulls.

"What ? Who are you ?"

"Veronica Neophytou, though everyone calls me Ronnie. I work with Simon and he asked to make sure you were looked after. Perhaps I could come down and see you sometime this week ?"

"Never heard of you and Simon never mentioned your name."

Desperation or inspired, she wasn't quite certain. Ronnie just wanted to use a few names Tom might have actually heard of.

"There's just me in the office now Tom. Clara has gone away with Simon and Laura has been busy with her own projects."

More river noises, it sounds like the deep tone of a tugboat's horn.

"Yes, Laura told me I might not see her for a while. There is something.....Are you really any good though ? I know Simon and Clara, I respect their ability to deliver."

"I hate people who promise everything and deliver nothing." Said Ronnie. "You can trust me, you have my word."

"Do you know Cyril ?"

"Not know as in on first name terms. I know Cyril Carter is important to Simon, and his business."

Tom appeared to be thinking, while yelling at someone called Beetle.

"Sorry Ronnie, it's one of those days. Look.... This afternoon is crazy, but I would like to meet you. There is a competitor I'd like some advice on dealing with."

"I can talk that over with you. I can be at your office at nine in the morning."

"Make that ten, I'll be watching football until late. What car do you drive ?"

"One of those Smart Car things.... I think Simon makes me drive it as a joke."

"That sounds like Simon.... Honk twice at the gate and the lads will let you in."

After the call Ronnie sat back in the chair and wondered how Simon would react to her trying to upsell to one of his clients. He'd never seriously threatened to sack her and she did owe him a bit of payback.

"After all.... The bastard did get me that damn Smart Car."

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They hadn't worked out the dos and don'ts yet, the etiquette of her using bits of what was the only home he currently had. Akiva Yatsko had betrayed the Silver Dawn to help her. As far as she knew the squatted apartment in Ramat Eshkol was the only place he had to sleep, cook, have a shower and carry out the other essentials of a civilised life. She wasn't there in the role of home invader though. Akiva had actually encouraged her to use the lounge as her lair, for a while. Actually, encouraged was overdoing it, he'd grudgingly agreed.

"Come on Akiva, I need somewhere to keep my stuff, especially the guns. You only seem to use one room and you said no one ever bothers you. I could pay rent or something."

"Alright.....Just restock the refrigerator every now and then. I had no idea vampires ate so much....I always thought you never ate at all."

Laura filled up the fridge from the bags of food she'd bought in London. She was determined to be a good lair buddy. She'd even bought a few things she'd noticed Akiva nibbling at. They needed the rules though, the etiquette. Until they got that right, she was going to have to knock on his bedroom door. She knocked and opened the door about two inches.

"Akiva ! I'm here.....I'm going to take Walter and Emily's remains out of the body bags."

"Whoopee."

Laura was sure he liked her really. She rinsed out the coffee machine and set it to making the usual spluttering sounds, as it turned water and ground coffee into something truly glorious. The smell would help in waking up Akiva.

"If only I knew what I was supposed to do with you guys." She muttered.

There had been no instructions and Horus wasn't the kind of entity you could simply summon. Laura opened up both body bags and took out the remains of Walter and Emily Couzinier. The rug in the lounge was a bit grubby, though she didn't think that mattered. Laura carefully straightened the bones and mummified tissue, until the remains looked as tidy and dignified as possible. Nothing happened and although she sipped at her coffee for a while.....Nothing continued to happen.

"Walter..... Emily." She called out. "I have your bodies."

Akiva was lured out by the smell of coffee, just as she was getting irritated.

"This is crazy..... What the hell am I supposed to do ?"

"Have you summoned their spirits ?" Asked Akiva.

"I've shouted out a few times."

"No, you need to summon them from Duat, the underworld, the realm of the dead. I can help you, but we will need a few things."

Laura sighed, certain that the few things required would mean yet another artefact hunt that was likely to take days.

"Don't tell me, we need unicorn droppings and a gryphon feather."

Akiva didn't seem to be the most house proud guy in the world, which didn't bother her at all. There was a pile of supermarket bags in a corner of the room. He picked one up and dropped it at her feet.

"Actually most of it came from a crafts shop in Jerusalem." He said. "I used the age old tradition of paying them money for it all. I knew you'd probably need this stuff."

"How do you know all this ?" She asked.

"I went everywhere with the scholars of The Silver Dawn. After a while, what I heard and saw began to make sense.... Some of it even stayed in my head. Come on you will need a bowl from the kitchen.....Not one we use Laura."

A bowl, a plate, two spoons and a sharp knife. Laura chose what was dusty, assuming that meant it wasn't part of Akiva's usual kitchenware.

"The candles need to be placed at head and foot, with one either side. Before we do that, we need to swing the rug around. They need to be lying with their heads to the east."

That meant moving the table, of course it did. Laura was beginning to realise that arcane rituals were usually as troublesome as the cursedness of inanimate objects.

"Crap Akiva.....Do we need to do this every time I want to talk to them."

"No. Finish the summoning and you'll understand."

The herbs were all labelled, though most of the names meant nothing to her. She worked to his instructions, adding a few pinches to the bowl, sometimes a few leaves. It was all so mundane, that needing to cut her finger for a few drops of blood, made it all seem more authentic.

"You will be summoning them Laura, they will be bound to you in the world of the living. It needs to be your blood in the bowl."

She used her fingers to spread the paste from the bowl, over the top of the candles, just below the wicks.

"Once lit the candle wax will need to be hot enough for the paste to work."

More herbs and leaves to be scattered over the remains of Walter and Emily, before Akiva pointed at a zip lock bag with no description on it.

"You'll need the knife, it's tougher than it looks. It needs to be cut into a coarse powder and sprinkled over their heads."

Lumps of what looked like a resin in the bag and cutting it was hard work.

"What is this?" She asked.

"If I tell you, I guarantee you'll laugh. A serious manner is required for summoning the dead, a certain....Solemnity. It eases the passing of the departed back into our world."

"I understand, I promise I won't laugh."

"The resin is Myrrh. Quite hard to find these days."

Laura didn't stand a chance of suppressing the laugh, so she let it out.

"Myrrh!" She exclaimed. "So it isn't the most useless Christmas present in the world after all."

Akiva was glaring at her.

"Sorry."

"Use the back of a spoon Laura, the powder needs to be powder, not lumps."

Punishment for laughing, she was certain of it. It took some time to crush and cut the resin into anything resembling a powder. Time enough to mention something Akiva needed to know.

"Tim knows what I am by the way. There was a scar from the fight on my back and he saw it. He worked the rest out.....My fault for dating one of the smart ones."

"Are you going to kill him?"

"No.....No, of course not. I wouldn't have brought him with me if he wasn't important to me."

"Hmmm I see."

It was her turn to glare at him.

"That's it, just an I see?"

"Yes."

The Myrrh powder went over what had once been their heads. Laura lit the candles and sat cross legged at the feet of the remains. It took several minutes for the smell of herbs to begin coming off the hot wax. Akiva handed her a piece of paper with two lines written on it.

"That's it?" She asked.

“That is it.....Read it out loud slowly, leave it a minute and say it again. You might need to repeat it a dozen or more times until something happens.”

Laura decided to let her fangs drop and bring out the vampire side of her existence. Her voice would deepen and sound more solemn, plus her senses would be sharper. Akiva hadn't said what the something was that would happen and she wanted to see it, as soon as it appeared.

“Walter Cousinier, I summon you from Duat, land of the dead.”

“Emily Cousinier, I summon you from Duat, land of the dead.”

She waited and said it all again. After the fourteenth repetition, two fairly nebulous figures appeared near the door to the kitchen. They'd always been so solid looking before, so obviously there with her. At those times they'd been placed in our world by Horus though.

“Walter..... Emily. I can see you.” She said.

No reply, though the two figure moved closer. Laura let her fangs rise up into her jaw, just in case that side of her was making them wary. Slowly the two silent wraiths settled over their mortal remains.

“Now.....You watch, now it will work.” Muttered Akiva.

Laura was expecting something dramatic, like the remains vanishing or being swallowed up in some way. The forms of Walter and Emily solidified, but what remained of their physical bodies, hadn't changed.

“Is that it ? Has it finished ?” She asked.

The question had been meant for Akiva. It was the Cousiniers who replied.

“Thank you, we can now enter your world at will.” Said Walter.

“Please bury our remains in consecrated ground.” Said Emily.

“Of course I will.” Said Laura.

Small talk had never been her best skill and small talk to dead people wasn't easy. Laura watched, as their ethereal bodies glittered a little, before becoming almost like real people. She could see the kitchen light glowing slightly through Walter's head. Otherwise, the long dead tomb robbers would have looked like ordinary living Canadians from Ottawa.

“How do I call you to talk about the tasks required of me ?” She asked.

The two ghosts were looking at each other, like a regular couple. Laura thought she saw Emily shrug at Walter.

“We're here now dear.” Said Emily. “We won't always be visible, but we're now tied to you and this place.”

“This room to be precise.” Added Walter. “Talk to us and we'll hear you.”

“You can't get rid of us now.” Said Emily.

Laughter, definite laughter from Emily, as she announced that the dead couple had effectively become a permanent haunting. Unsurprisingly, Akiva seemed less than happy with the arrangement.

“Hey, you can't just lurk about in my lounge.” He said. “I might bring someone back..... You understand. There are times when I'll need privacy.”

“We were young once and we're not stupid.” Snorted Walter.

“Well said dear.” Said Emily. “We will know when to remain quiet and invisible.”

“That's not really what I.....” Began Akiva.

“We left a satchel where we died.” Said Walter. “Did you recover it.”

“Yes we did.”

Nice to change the subject, Akiva wasn't looking happy. They needed rules of the house and a little agreed etiquette. Now he might listen to her. She put the old leather satchel on the table and took out the ancient revolver.

"Oh, you found the gun, I'd forgotten about that." Said Emily.

"Far more accurate than you might think." Said Walter. "There was a notebook in the satchel, a few jottings about our travels."

Laura pulled it out of the satchel with a flourish, like a magician producing a rabbit out of a hat.

"I'm so pleased you found that, it has all our notes on Dessie in Ethiopia." Said Walter.

"Don't tell her..... Don't blurt it out, she won't like it." Said Emily. "Let her read our notes and look up Dessie for herself."

"I'm sorry, Emily gets very upset. We failed in Dessie, failed badly. Three people who came with us never returned home."

"No Walter.....Let her read about it and look it up on the machines they use. Tell her and she won't want to go."

"I'm not easily upset or scared." Said Laura.

"You will be by what lies beneath the ground to the west of Dessie." Said Walter.

"Stop it Walter..... Let her read everything first."

"Very good..... We'll talk to you again tomorrow." Said Walter.

Were they gone, or just invisible ? Laura could see why it might trouble Akiva and she didn't have to sleep there.

"We could always find another empty apartment." Said Akiva.

"I get the feeling they'd just follow us there."

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Patsy had seen the guy in the smart suit join the queue. He stood out among the greasy denim fraternity, though a customer in a two grand suit wasn't unknown. A regular at the counter was a wealthy Greek guy with a three hundred grand Bentley. He liked to do the servicing himself, said it kept him grounded.

"Hi Patsy, how's the course going ?"

"Brilliant Tony..... How's the rebuild coming along ?"

"Not so good, the alternator is shot."

Tony was a regular and like all the regulars, the real trick was in selling him the part he wanted, without spending half an hour listening to why his seventies MK2 Cortina wasn't behaving itself. The queue looked a little fed up, but queues always do. Not the guy in the fancy suit though, or his buddy near the door. She'd seen them come in together. The guy at the door was broad, with East European features. The man in the Saville Row suit looked Asian, Hong Kong Asian, or maybe Japanese. They were both smiling at her, which was a little creepy. A few minutes digging in the dusty corner of the store room and she came back with a set of alternator brushes.

"Different part number to yours, but they'll fit. Ford used basically the same alternator right through the MK2 range."

Not her college course paying off, she'd just had to look up a lot of parts for Tony and the information had entered her brain and remained there. Learning by osmosis one of her lecturers called it.

"Thanks, you're a genius Patsy." Said Tony. "A genuine bona fide genius."

Still two regulars in front of the guy in the suit, though he didn't seem to care. If anything the smile became broader, as they made eye contact. Creepy, but Patsy felt safe behind the car parts counter. There were at least three large guys in the stores to back her up and then there were the regulars. "Next." She yelled.

Patsy liked to imagine names for the guys in the queue and add a little back story to each face. By the time the guy in the suit was stood in front of her, he'd become Paulie Posh Suit. American Italian of course, with connections to the mob and a grandfather in the Yakuza. Why he was in Hayle's Motor Factors was yet to be determined.

"What can I help you with?" She asked.

He didn't have a grubby piece of paper with part numbers on it, which was quite rare. He leant over the counter, but didn't get close enough to be alarming.

"Patsy Smart.....My name is David and we need to talk." He said. "Don't be alarmed, I promise it's not bad news."

The first, second and third ideas to enter her head, was that it had something to do with Simon. A fair assumption, as ninety percent of the weirdness in her life, seemed to originate from the house in Hornsey.

"Why would I want to talk to you?" She asked. "If you're not here to buy anything, get out of the queue."

"I came here rather than knocking on your front door, so that you'd feel safe." Said David. "I just need a few minutes of your time and I don't mind waiting. Perhaps there's a café quite near, somewhere you know?"

"You know where I live?"

There was an edge to her voice. Spud was a little further along the counter. A biker who came in to buy bits for his girlfriend's Fiat 500. Spud was a pussy cat really, one of the nice guys. He was huge though and David wouldn't know he was harmless.

"Is that guy bothering you?" Asked Spud.

Was he? Knowing her address meant nothing, other than that he might be a friend of someone she knew. He had come into where she worked, where she did feel safe. There was a small local café a few doors away where they knew her. And once he was up close, the smile wasn't that creepy.

"No, I'm fine Spud..... Thanks though."

"Alright David, do you have a second name?"

"Yes, I'm David Huynh."

She was right, probably the mob. David Huynh had a definite American twang when he pronounced his surname.

"Got anything to prove that?"

He showed her a MasterCard from a bank she'd never heard of. The name was his though, a Mr David Huynh. It was a platinum card, but everyone seemed to get those these days.

"Alright we can talk." She said. "You'll need to wait or come back though, I take my lunch break just after one."

"No problem."

Patsy was a little disappointed when he left the shop, taking his heavy set friend with him. David returned though, about ten minutes before she usually took an hour for lunch. He was alone, waiting for her in the same corner where Simon sometimes waited. Still that smile, which was back to being quite creepy.

"I'm going to the Oasis." She yelled at her boss, as she picked up her bag and jacket.

She opened the shop door and beckoned to David.

"That smile is doing you no favours at all." She told him.

"Why?"

"Definitely a bit creepy."

"But..... I practised in the mirror for hours."

His smile when he wasn't trying too hard to smile, was actually quite nice. David wasn't the sort of guy she usually went for, but at one time she might have given him her phone number at a party.

"I like the suit by the way."

"I mainly wear it to get free upgrades on airlines."

"Does it work?"

"Not as often as I'd like."

"Where did you fly in from to see me?"

"France."

It sounded like an honest reply. Definitely information to file away and remember.

"No friend with you?"

"He had a few chores to take care of."

The Oasis Café was small and sometimes the tables were a bit grubby. It served good food though and the coffee was drinkable. The owner and his wife knew her, making it somewhere she felt safe. They managed to get a table in the window, with a decent view of the High Street.

"What's good?" Asked David.

"They do a sausage sandwich to die for..... And the coffee is pretty good."

No reaction, no sign he'd have preferred tofu burgers in a place that guaranteed everything was vegan. They ordered a sausage sandwich each and two coffees.

"So... Tell me David. Why come all the way from France to see me?"

"I know you're a good friend of Laura Selway."

"Yes, I am..... Has this got something to do with Laura?"

"The organisation I work for would like to see her. My boss wants to offer her a job, a very well paid job. We were hoping you might be able to help us arrange that."

It didn't really make sense and as far as she knew, Laura wasn't interested in anything that even vaguely looked like a serious career.

"Couldn't you just phone her?" Asked Patsy.

"Difficult, there would be a trust issue. My boss would like to meet Laura somewhere public and of her choosing. The offer of a job is genuine, but there has been a little bad blood in the past."

"What organisation David? Who do you work for?" She asked.

David looked a little upset and he'd probably look more upset, once he realised some brown sauce had ended up on his shirt.

"You and me, right now. We're fine aren't we Patsy?"

"Well, yes.....I don't think you mean me any harm."

"Just keep that idea in your mind..... I work for Nathalie Aurigny, who is the current leader of my order. I'm here as a representative of The Silver Dawn."

Patsy wasn't worried or scared in the slightest. To her it was funny and she laughed for quite some time. After ordering a second coffee, she leant across the table.

"I'll help you David.....But I can't guarantee Laura won't eat you." She whispered.

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"I'm only doing all this because Jake asked me to." Said Judith. "He seems to have taken quite a shine to the pair of you, since you rescued him from the trouble at the Greenwich Naval College."
"We saved his life." Said Clara.

Jake seemed to have either forgotten about fighting with her, trying to hit her as she put him in Simon's van. Or he'd chosen not to tell anyone about it. Either way, Clara didn't feel a need to mention it to Judith. All's well that ends well seemed a sensible philosophy.

"You did and you dealt with our Jinn, though it created chaos in Eastern Jerusalem before it finally vanished. I appreciated your help, which is why I'm signing all the documents involved."

"We only had a chance to open two of the crates." Said Simon.

He had the look of someone given the best Christmas present ever, only to have it taken away before he'd had a chance to play with it. Clara could understand his feelings, she was feeling the same way.

"Have you got somewhere in London to open them?" Asked Judith. "Somewhere safe?"

"Our house, we'll go through the contents at the weekend." Said Clara.

Judith still had the white flash of hair, she was probably cursed with it for the rest of her life. It gave her a permanent look of being scared. Her expression was adding to the effect.

"You're both vampires and I'd never dream of telling you your business...."

"Out with it Judith...We promise not to get mad." Said Simon.

"Do you have a cellar or something?" Asked Judith.

"No." Said Clara.

"It's just that the Couziniers had a reputation for keeping any powerful artefacts they found, and as for Sam.....We now know he used a powerful Jinn as a watchdog. If I was storing these crates.....I'd rent a cottage in the middle of nowhere."

"We're going to stack them in the cupboard under the stairs." Said Simon.

Judith had a look of horror on her face. Not just her, a team of four Psochics had just repacked the Couziniers crates into two larger crates, for air transportation to London. Five horror struck faces were enough to make Clara consider a safer way of storing the crates.

"We might review that decision." She said.

"Definitely." Added Simon.

The courier company were due any minute. They specialised in transporting valuable antiques for auction houses and legitimate dealers. Simon and her had been through the risks with Judith and had decided the expensive courier company was the best way of getting Walter and Emily's treasure to London.

"They're known to the authorities at both ends." Judith had told them. "In all the time Sam used them, only one crate was ever opened when it arrived at Heathrow. There is a risk your crates might be opened, but a small one. And if they do open them up..... They'll just see what I signed off on the manifest. A routine shipment of historical objects."

When the uniformed courier people came to collect the crates, Clara and Simon stood some distance away and watched. Judith filled in the final paperwork and had a conversation with one of the men. That was what made the method of transportation a safe way to smuggle so many mysterious artefacts to London. It was Judith's reputation, coupled with the reputation Sam had built up over the years.

"It'll all be there in London waiting for us when we get back." Said Clara. "I'm sure of it."

"I'll call Patsy and remind her to be there to accept the delivery."

They'd only be a day behind the crates. Both of them had jobs and lives to get back to, even if her job was going to be looking for a job. Clara noticed she no longer had the involuntary frown when Simon talked about Patsy. She wasn't sure if that was a good thing, or a bad. Once the courier had left, they said their goodbyes to Judith and the Psochics.

"Laura will be in Jerusalem for a while, but I can't see your paths crossing." Said Clara.

"Her presence has been noted by our seers. Not that it concerns me, I'll be back in London in a few weeks. I just need to finalise the sale of this building....I will miss the old place."

Oh, how often Clara wished she could go back in time and not tell Simon he needed to work on his socialising skills. He had all the social skills of a hermit who'd lived in a cave for hundreds of years but thanks to her pep talk, he felt a need to experiment.

"Open up to people, give them a little of yourself and they will respond." She'd said, like an idiot. Simon was sales guy for Christ's sake, a good one. That he did by pulling on a fake persona and pretending to have genuine feelings and empathy. Why the hell hadn't she left well alone and let him carry on pretending.....She cringed as she heard him clear his throat.

"Give us a call when you get back." Said Simon. "You could come over to the house for one of our pizza and beer nights."

"There is wine too.....We usually watch an old movie on DVD." Said Clara.

Some dark deity must have decided Simon had tried hard enough. No hugging or anything, but Judith was smiling as she shook Simon's hand.

"I'd love to, and I'm not just being polite. I will call you when I'm back in London."

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