

## Quid Pro Quo

(Season three of London's Night Stalkers)

### Chapter 7 – Beneath Dessie

**“At the back of her mind an idea briefly surfaced that the entire car breakers yard might be a cover for something. The thought was dismissed, mainly because Simon always struck her as a bit straight and maybe even.....Dull on occasions.”**

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Liz Grant wondered why wherever the Gudara had taken them, smelled like the elephant house at the zoo.

“Are you alright Jack ?” She asked.

Bonding had taken place, they'd been in the realm of dreams for what felt like a very long time. She felt comfortable putting her arm around Jack's shoulders. She hated the idea of becoming maternal and put her protectiveness down to being in each other's company for so long.

“I feel so tired Liz.”

“Me too.”

They'd been with Wiremi's people, his tribe, for what had felt like a year or more. It was all fast vanishing from her memory though, as if it had all been nothing but a dream. Her clothes were the ones she been wearing in the house in Hornsey, all that time ago. Only now they felt stale and slightly grubby.

“Where has he dropped us off ? Oh, now that explains the smell.” She said.

The sounds had made her turn around. In a wooden pen, were the three largest pigs Liz had ever seen. They were busy feeding from a trough and totally ignoring the humans who'd just arrived in their home.

“It's the pig shed.....I'm home.” Said Jack

“Nice.....You're home, but I'm in Scotland with only the clothes I'm wearing.”

“Mum.....I must let her know I'm alright.”

“Does your mum have a phone ?”

No good, Jack had set off like a bullet from a gun. He was through the shed door and running to see his mum. Of course there'd be a phone, it wasn't the dark ages, even if she was stood on a grubby stone floor, looking at three pigs enjoying their breakfast.

“Got any spare turnips pig ? I'm starving.”

The largest pig gave quite an aggressive grunt.

“You too buddy.....Time to find Jack's mum.”

Gwen, of course his mum was the famous Gwen. Famous in the Hornsey house for putting up with Daniel and all his craziness. Daniel ! He'd be wondering where the hell Jack had vanished to for so long.

“They might think he's dead.” She muttered.

Liz hurried out of the shed and into the fresh air of what appeared to be morning in Pitmedden in the Parish of Udney. A glorious morning with just one unpleasant thing there to spoil it. Her, the clothes she wore were definitely a little over ripe and she could do with a long hot shower.

“Please don't be hysterical Gwen. I don't think I could handle that today.”

Several buildings to choose from, but only one had a front garden full of well-tended flowers and homemade curtains on all the windows. Clara had once described Daniel's house to her, complete with a description of the secret medical lab in the basement. Liz knocked on the front door and noticed it was unlocked and slightly ajar.

"Gwen ! It's me, Liz from London. I'm Laura's friend." She shouted.

That was it, she'd done what was appropriate as a member of civilised society. If they were on the wrong small holding and an angry crofter was about to appear with a machete in his hands, she could handle it. There were distinct advantages in being an almost indestructible minion of the Ancient Gods. No more being timid or calling out, she strode into what looked like the kitchen.

"Now Jack..... Let go of me and I'll get you some breakfast."

Jack was wrapped around his mother's arm and he was crying. Some words were coming out of the poor lad, but only 'love you' and 'mum' were making it through the sobbing. Gwen looked middle aged, with the sort of body you get after years of hard work on the land. Clara had once described Gwen as solid looking, which was accurate, even if it had sounded cruel.

"I'm so sorry.....You must have been so worried." Said Liz. "I didn't think.....None of us thought we'd be away that long."

Gwen wasn't crying, she didn't even look relieved, or concerned. If the woman looking at her had one main expression on her face, it was startled confusion.

"I spoke to Daniel late last night." Said Gwen. "He said everything was fine in London. How.....Did you bring my boy home ?"

No one had ever accused Liz of being stupid. She always put her reasoning skills down to a Jewish upbringing, rather than DNA. It had been her first time in Wiremi's world and she'd forgotten Laura telling her time there worked to its own rules, if it could be said to exist at all.

"How long ago did Daniel take Jack to London ?" She asked.

"Yesterday of course, yesterday morning."

"To Jack and I, it felt like we were away for over a year."

Gwen held Jack close, kissing the top of his head.

"My poor boy ! You're not taking him anywhere again."

"I won't you have my promise. A change of clothing would be nice though, anything will do. And I'd like to use your phone if I can ?"

Gwen was looking her over, the way some men looked her over. Luckily Gwen's motives were both pure and helpful.

"I've got some jeans that'll go with a belt that's too tight for me anyway. Then there are a few T shirts of Daniel's that he doesn't fit into anymore. I'm sure I can find you something that will look fairly decent.....The phone is on the table in the lounge."

It looked as though Gwen would have to prepare breakfast with a sobbing Jack attached to her arm. The boy had come back different, Wiremi had worked a little magic or something on the boy. No need to tell Gwen about it though, she'd notice soon enough. Liz left mother and son alone and went in search of a phone. The lounge was comfortably, airy and best of all, she had it to herself. She didn't even have to think about who to call.

"Brendan, I'm in Scotland.... Daniel's place."

"How did you end up there ?"

"I can't say much over the phone, but we need to talk once I'm home. Can you call my boss for me ? Tell him I'm sick or something.....Crap ! I've only been there five minutes. If he sacks me he sacks me."

“Are you alright Liz ? You sound upset.”

Liz was determined not to get upset and she definitely wasn't going to cry. What she had to do was so dreadful that it was way beyond tears.

“I'm alright.....I love you Brendan. I know I don't say that often enough.”

“Oh shit, you're scaring me now. How bad is it ? Whatever it is.”

“It's bad.... I just want to get home. I'm having to borrow clothes from Gwen and I don't even have a credit card on me. New rule ! If I go to a strange place again, make sure I take plastic with me.”

“I will, I will. I'll pack a bag for you and fly up there. I'm sure I know where your passport is. Do you need anything else ?”

It was going to sound so fucking pathetic, but he'd understand. Brendan always understood, it was why she loved the dopey idiot.

“Come and get me Brendan, please. No planes..... I know it's a long way, but get in your van and come here....I need you..... Please.”

“I'll be on the road as soon as I pack a few things. What is it Liz, why are you so upset ?”

Silly not to say over the phone when she thought about it. If anyone was listening to their conversation, they'd never believe a word of it.

“I have to go there Brendan. I need to find my way past the twenty one secret gates and find the last gate to Duat, The Underworld.”

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Ronnie Neophytou was expecting something a little more flashy. All the awards, all the hints at plenty of available income, a company on the way up. There were a few arrows pointing to the 'Car Parts Recycling Centre,' but the main theme of Tom's business was obviously wrecked cars. They were like a wall behind the perimeter fence; they lined up either side of the uninviting looking front gates.

'No entry for the public. Use recycling centre entrance.'

The sign on the front gates was hardly inviting, but she stopped the Smart Car about six inches from the gates and sounded the horn a couple of times. At the back of her mind an idea briefly surfaced that the entire car breakers yard might be a cover for something. The thought was dismissed, mainly because Simon always struck her as a bit straight and maybe even.....Dull on occasions.

“No.... If Simon's involved, they're a legit business.” She muttered.

The gate clanged and rattled as it opened, moving to one side. A young man was waiting for her, smiling as he approached. Ronnie pressed the button to lower her window.

“Have you been here before ?” He asked her.

“No first time. My name is Ronnie Neophytou and Mr Ives is expecting me.”

“I know.... Lady in a Smart Car who works with Simon. I'm Beetle.”

The same Beetle who seemed to get shouted at a lot while she was on the phone with Tom Ives. Beetle had a neglected look about him, right down to a cardigan with holes in the elbows. Nothing threatening about him though, just that friendly smile.

“You're to drive right through.....Tom will meet you at the back fence. Right by the river.”

“Thank you Beetle.”

“Do you know Laura ?”

“Not that well, no.”

Beetle seemed to lose interest. He waived her through the gate, before vanishing among the ever present piles of wrecked cars.

“Looks like being one of those days.” She muttered.

Once she was past the outer walls of piled up wrecks, the car breakers looked more like she'd expected. New looking buildings with proper signage and quite a few workers operating cranes with claws or huge magnets. She drove past two men dressed in reasonably clean overalls.

"I'm looking for Tom Ives?"

"Right through..... Drive right through, he's down by the back fence."

At last she could see why Simon thought so much of the place. There was a neat red sign above the respray building and another for somewhere doing argon arc welding, whatever that was. Tom's business was beginning to look efficient, busy and prosperous. Quite a few buildings with no signs at all, but everything looked busy.

"If I can't sign Tom up for something.....I'll quit sales and become a table dancer."

One of her regular one-liners at the office, Simon called them Ronnie'isms. She'd sign Tom up for something, it was what she was good at. Insurance he never knew he needed, perhaps a little offshore investment Anthony had been trying to push. Something far more lucrative than a new phone system or a copier. She almost asked for directions again, before noticing two men sat near the back fence. She parked as close as she could to them, though the mud on the path was still going to make a mess of her best pair of heels.

"Mr Ives? I'm Ronnie, we spoke on the phone."

The largest of the two men walked away. The man who stood up and held out his hand, had kind eyes.

"Tom, everyone calls me Tom." He said. "So.... You're looking after things while Simon is away?"

"Yes, Yes I am."

No asking her to sit, Tom started walking and she assumed she was meant to follow.

"We're moving into something new." Said Tom. "Classic cars are big and getting bigger. We're setting up a workshop where enthusiasts can use our tools and get the benefit of experts on hand. I'll show you the building and it gets us out of the wind."

"You've been doing well Tom. All those awards from the local council."

Most business men seemed pleased by praise, some seemed to live for it. Not Tom Ives though, he gave her a really strange look. He went into the new building first, holding the door open for her.

"Have you spoken to Cyril recently?" He asked.

"Yes, I'm hoping to see him soon."

"Strange..... He's never heard of you."

They weren't worried about her screaming, that was the really weird part. The huge man she'd seen before, had grabbed her from behind. No trying to stop her yelling or struggling, he'd picked her up as though she was a child having a tantrum. He shoved her onto a leather office chair in the centre of the room, before leaning right into her face.

"Shut up and behave yourself, if you know what's good for you." He said.

"I haven't done anything."

Tom was still near the door and his eyes still looked kind.

"Cyril doesn't know you from Adam." He said.

"Alright, I lied to get to see you.....I'm sorry."

"Are you a cop?" Asked the huge man.

"People know where I am." She said.

She'd seen it work in TV shows, but they didn't seem at all impressed. Tom opened one of the windows that looked in the direction of the river, allowing the sound of gulls to be heard.

“Accidents happen near the river Ronnie.” Said Tom. “Terrible accidents. No one’s fault of course if a woman in heels slips and falls. She hits her head, is knocked unconscious and the next moment..... She’s in the water. Tragic.....Bloody tragic.”

“I haven’t done anything wrong.” Said Ronnie.

Beetle came in with the briefcase she’d left on the passenger seat of her car. Ronnie was beyond feeling angry or violated though. She’d got herself into something best left alone and just wanted to get home alive and preferably unharmed. Beetle started showing Tom things from her briefcase. The huge man put his face about an inch away from hers, before bellowing at her.

“Tell us who sent you, or things will start to get nasty. Go in the Thames here and they’ll find your body washed up near Gravesend. Not that it’ll be recognisable, once the crabs have been at it for a while.”

“Easy..... Easy Tony.” Said Tom. “Make her shit in her knickers and we’ll get nothing out of her.”

Tom came over and looked at her for a while, as if making his mind up about something.

“Can you get me a chair please Beetle ?”

“Yes, of course.”

Silly really, but she had to ask. It had been nagging at her for a while, though it might have been a case of saying anything to relieve the stress.

“Why Beetle ?” She asked. “His name I mean.... Why Beetle.”

“His name is Bailey, so Beetle Bailey. It’s a character in a comic....More in America than here.”

Beetle Bailey returned with a chair and Tom sat and looked at her for a while, again.

“I saw your business cards and your sales reports.” Said Tom. “You really are a sales person who works for Simon, aren’t you ?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Be truthful now, this is important. Why me ? What did you hope to gain by coming here today ?”

“I was hoping to sell you business insurance.” She said. “There’s bound to be something not covered by your existing policy. I was going to mention some offshore property deals too.... Very good for large amounts you’d rather not pay tax on.”

“And even now, you’re still trying to sell me on the idea.”

“Of course I am, I’m good at what I do.”

Tom was smiling and his eyes were still kind. Ronnie began to think she might get home in one piece after all. Tom lves sighed at her.

“Oh Ronnie, what am I going to do with you.” He muttered.

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Simon looked at the row of crates they’d decided could never be kept in the house. Of course they’d ended up in the house, the temptation to open them up and go through everything was irresistible. There they were and instead of the cupboard under the stairs, they were stacked against the rear wall of the lounge.

“I just wish Laura was here.” Said Clara. “She’d really enjoy going through it all.”

“Have you heard from her ?”

“Nothing for days. She’s probably down the rabbit hole somewhere in Egypt.”

He was tired, they’d moved the boxes as soon as they’d got home. Their cases were still in the hallway and a huge heap of mail had been pushed to one edge of the doormat. So many things needed their attention, but like him, Clara seemed to only have eyes for one thing.

“You open one while I put some coffee on.” She said. “Then I open the next while you make bacon sandwiches.....Agreed ?”

“Agreed.”

The tool box came out of where it had been collecting dust for quite some time. No pry bar, but a claw hammer looked perfect for getting tops and sides off crates. Vampire strength came into its own, as he lifted a crate from the pile and placed it at his feet.

“Please don’t explode or anything.” He muttered at the crate. “No Jinns either, we’ve had enough of those.”

He’d mentally rehearsed it on the plane. Off came the front and sides of the crate, which meant he could lift the top straight off. There were the contents, ready to be gone through and examined. Clara shouted from the kitchen.

“I might as well do breakfast now I’m in here..... Don’t you dare open another crate. The next is mine.”

“I won’t.”

“What does that one look like ?”

Simon decided to be honest, it might save disappointment later.

“It looks like junk covered in bits of paper.”

“Be careful with the paper.”

“I will.”

Simon didn’t really believe in coincidences. Maybe over silly things, like running into the same neighbour three times in ASDA, but not when it came to the big stuff. The very first piece of paper he flattened out on the coffee table, made him gasp.

“Fuck.” He said

Clara came in with coffee.

“Breakfast will be in five minutes.” She said. “Are you alright ?”

“Look at this Clara and tell me I’m not imagining it.”

No gasp, she seemed more amused than surprised, but it wasn’t a seven hundred year old drawing of her lying on their coffee table.

“It’s you Simon, wow..... You used to have a pointy beard. I quite like that.”

“It was the first piece of paper I saw in the crate, right on top of everything.”

“Coincidences have been known to happen Simon.”

“Really ? You still believe that, after everything we’ve seen ?”

Clara was ignoring him, turning the picture around in her hands.

“They caught your face perfectly.....Did Giovanni draw this ? No, I’d say a woman....One who was quite keen on you.”

Thirteenth century Italy had been a hell of a long time ago. Simon had to think about it, almost like sending a search party to dig out the memories. Once he had her face, the rest of the memories bubbled up to the surface.

“A girl, barely out of childhood.” He said. “I remember her now, Giovanni found her on the streets and brought her home with him one night. I never did understand why he let her wander around his home as she pleased. He never fed on her, or shared his bed with her. I had the idea he felt sorry for Niña, child in Italian. I don’t remember ever knowing her real given name. She became Giovanni’s one good act in a wicked world. To amuse us Niña drew us, and all our friends and visitors.”

“She had talent.” Said Clara. “What became of the girl ?”

“I remember that, she died a year or two later. What we called the Flux got her, some sort of dysentery. Giovanni cried for days I seem to remember. He always claimed to have burned all her drawings, which was obviously a lie.”

The next piece of paper Simon flattened out was a bill of some kind. The next was too faded to tell what it had been. The real find came when he'd given up on finding any more of Niña's artwork. He flattened the yellowing paper and passed it to Clara.

"Paper was expensive then and only the best inks for our Niña." He said. "Worth it though, that is a face I'd almost forgotten."

A time when they'd all been relaxing after a meal, though Simon's memory refused to come up with a year, much less any other details. Simon was sat in a chair, but the real focus of the drawing was Giovanni, in the boots that had cost him a small fortune.

"The year twelve ninety nine, maybe thirteen hundred, that was when he had those boots." Said Simon. "So... It looks like we both had small pointy beards. My only defence is the ludicrous fashions of the time."

"I don't know, you both look quite handsome." Said Clara. "I take if the vague outline of a child is your Niña signing her work?"

"Yes, though she only did that on drawings she was particularly pleased with.....I think I can smell burning bacon."

"Crap!" Yelled Clara.

Some swearing and the sound of a roll top bin being closed quite angrily, meant Clara was probably having a second try at making a couple of bacon sandwiches. He found two more drawings of himself and one more of Giovanni, without the ludicrously expensive boots. The final screwed up piece of very old paper, made him want to call for Clara. No, he decided to leave her alone until breakfast appeared. They'd had mirrors then of course, though most of the population used highly polished steel surfaces. Not well paid assassins for the Medici though, they'd had a proper glass mirror on the wall. Reflections had a blueish tinge, but were good enough for the girl to draw the self-portrait he held in his hands.

"Poor Niña, this must have been the year you died." He muttered.

She still hadn't looked fully grown, what arty types like to call an ingénue. Pretty, the sort of girl who'd have married well if the Flux hadn't taken her. She'd drawn the pictures of him with such love, yet he'd often barely registered her presence, as she'd flitted around the house.

"Maybe not in the lounge, but I think your drawings will be framed and go in the spare bedroom." He muttered.

Back to the crate and removing the papers had revealed a heavy statue of a cat. Made out of solid gold, with precious stones for eyes. Probably worth enough to keep them in pizza and prosecco for a good number of years. He forgot about not disturbing Clara.

"Walter and Emily definitely liked their gold." He yelled.

"Almost done, I'll be in there in a minute. You must be starved."

He was, but there was something lying on the floor of the crate, something long and serpentine. It looked like a mummified snake, something quite small, like a Black mamba. Age had blackened what was left of whatever had been used to wrap the long dead snake.

"Wow, this really is like Christmas come early." He muttered.

As Simon lifted the mummified snake, the wrapping came completely away. The first thing he notices was the strong smell, a mixture of herbs and chemicals. He'd worn a short sleeved shirt, and the second thing he noticed was the snake twisting itself around his right arm, just above the wrist. For some reason he was more amazed than scared.

"Who the hell are you then? Another sodding Jinn?"

Eyes, it had eyes, which seemed strange for something long dead and mummified. A tongue too, that flicked in and out of its mouth. The serpent didn't seem aggressive though, or the least bit threatening. If it had wanted to bite him, it was in the perfect place. It carried on wrapping itself around his arm, until its head rested just below his elbow.

"Too much to put on a tray.....Come and eat in here." Shouted Clara.

"On my way.....I'm bringing a friend."

It looked like his new friend was asleep, there was no sign of movement, or that it was even alive. Normally Simon could tell if something was alive or dead, but the snake was giving off nothing. He went into the kitchen with the creature wrapped around his arm.

"What the hell.....Is that thing ?" Asked Clara.

"A mummified snake that came out of the box."

"It doesn't look mummified."

"Not now it doesn't, but it did when it was in the box."

He knew Clara well; her attitude was definitely more interested than worried.

"Have you tried pulling it off ?" She asked.

"I thought that might annoy it."

Simon was hungry and their kitchen table was covered in nice things, including several rounds of bacon sandwiches. They ate in silence, while Clara made no attempt to hide her curiosity about the snake curled around his arm.

"Does it hurt ?" She asked.

"No, it seemed friendly, almost domesticated. Maybe it was once someone's pet."

"Or it's another Jinn."

"Yes, that was worrying me." He said.

It had to go of course, he could hardly go to work with a snake on his arm. Simon was usually all about action, decisions made quickly and acted upon. Quite a few people had referred to him as reckless, at one time or another. Now though, he thought the snake needed to be thought about and its removal..... Pondered on for a while. His phone rang, a name he was planning on calling that day anyway.

"Hi Tom, how's life in Erith Upon Thames ?"

"I wasn't sure when you were getting back."

"Walked in the door off the red eye, just a few hours ago. Our bags are still in the hall."

"Did you have a good time ?"

"Yes, plenty of sunshine and decent food."

Clara stood up and left the kitchen. He heard her footsteps as she went upstairs. There was a way she had of walking, striding with a purpose, that worried him a little.

"I'm calling because your lady came to see me, Veronica Neophytou. I believe you know her as Ronnie."

"Yes, bright lady..... Why was she seeing you Tom ?"

"It appears she found my name in an old diary of yours. It took a while to get the truth out of her. Your Ronnie was looking for juicy clients to call and found your diary."

"Crap ! She must have forced my desk open. She is pushy to the point of driving you crazy, but harmless. I hope no one hurt her Tom ?"

He heard Tom yelling something at Beetle, about making sure their visitor was comfortable, whatever that might mean.

“She’s fine Simon, I just sent Beetle to check on her. Tony scared her a bit, but she soon got over that. Stopping her talking is the problem now. I have a horrible feeling I just agreed to buy a new phone system.”

“That sounds like Ronnie. Send her to see me Tom, I’ll read her the riot act. Tell her to drive straight to my house, no stops, no phone calls, or she won’t have a job in the morning.”

“Thanks Simon, I’ll leave you talk to her. To be honest I’ll be glad to get her off the premises. I can see me signing up for a new copier if she’s here much longer.”

“She can be a bit.....Persistent. Thanks for looking after her Tom.”

He was into his second sandwich and eyeing a plate of shop bought macaroons, when Clara came back into the kitchen. There it was again, that slightly scary look in her eyes. She had a medical grade first aid kit over her shoulder and her Yemeni Janbiya, clasped firmly in her hand.

“It has to go Simon..... That snake has to be removed.”

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Akiva had proven to be remarkably skilled at obtaining anything and everything she mentioned being essential in her task to keep the Ancient Gods happy. As she studied online images of Dessie in Ethiopia, he entered the apartment and dropped another bag on the lounge floor. A gifted acquirer of supplies, but Akiva seemed to have no idea of keeping somewhere tidy.

“Caving lights, with spare batteries.” He said. “Unless you can think of anything else, we’re at the putting backpacks together and heading for Ethiopia stage.”

“Where did you get them ?” She asked.

“Don’t ask.”

The trouble with going somewhere you didn’t know, to face perils you had no idea about, was what to take with you. Walter and Emily drifted through the apartment as though it was theirs, but they weren’t good at explaining any local issues in Dessie that might cause problems.

“Just read our journals dear.” Emily kept telling her.

Weapons would be needed of course and a few changes of clothing. Laura could survive for a long time without food or water, though she preferred not to. Cutting back on fluids tended to give her a round the clock headache, and sometimes a little brain fog. Akiva had to eat and drink, which meant carrying food and water.

“Can you start on the backpacks ?” She asked. “I’m still looking for that perfect spot for us to arrive.”

“Fine.”

He said fine in a way that meant exactly the opposite. They’d already had a few words about her spending hours going through the Couzinier’s journals. When she’d started going through the online holiday pictures of strangers, the rows had begun.

“There’s a lot to get done Laura....A little help would be appreciated.”

“I need a picture of where we want to go, or as close as I can get.”

“Can’t Horus help ?”

“It’s not like that and you know it. Be patient, I just need to find the right spot. Be grateful the entire world and their pet cat, are now posting every picture they possess on social media. Can you imagine doing this with a printed encyclopaedia.”

He was making a lot of noise putting things into their packs, when she found the perfect picture. Two women in their twenties, who’d taken a trip through the lesser known parts of Ethiopia. Why they’d gone there was unimportant, as were their names. There it was on Pinterest, the picture she’d been hoping to find.

“Found it.” She said. “Even looking in the right direction, you can see the three pyramids.”

Akiva couldn't hide his enthusiasm as he looked at the picture. There they were, the three badly weather eroded pyramids Walter and Emily had told them about.

'There are more pyramids in Ethiopia than Egypt.' It said under the pic.

"So now you can take us to that exact spot?" Asked Akiva.

"I can, right to the place where.....What's her name? Consuela....Yes, I can place us at the exact same spot where Consuela took that picture."

"Brilliant, when do we go?"

Laura had to think about the time difference between Jerusalem and Ethiopia, which as luck would have it, was zero. It was currently the exact same time there, as it was in Dessie.

"We can go as soon as we've packed everything." She said. "We should arrive with enough daylight to find our way underground before nightfall."

Akiva began to pack with an eagerness that was contagious. Strange to be so happy about going to somewhere Walter thought of as too horrible to talk about. Anything was better than inaction though, spending day after day looking at the same four walls.

"There's a lot to carry." Said Akiva. "Could we leave some of the water and come back for it? And if we left some of the food behind the packs would be far easier to carry."

There was a lot to carry, the size of the packs did look a bit daunting, especially once the bedrolls and blankets had been put on the top.

"We're both strong Akiva." She said. "Unless you fancy telling the Gods that we're using their realm as a conduit to go home for beer and a pizza?"

"Good point..... As you say, we're both strong enough to carry the packs."

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Patsy Smart knew Laura had the ability to simply appear anywhere she chose. It wasn't just an excuse to be in Laura's room again, she kept telling herself that. She'd already left messages on Laura's phone and sent a few texts. Nothing that would give anything away to anyone spying on Laura of course, just a quick message.

'We need to talk Laura. Something has come up that you really do need to know about.'

Patsy had even left a message about it on Clara's phone. A message and a text to Clara, whatever next? Patsy was aware that her relationship with Clara might look friendly, but she was walking a constant knife edge. The message to ask her to contact Laura, had been short and respectful. They were supposed to be home by now, the crates had been moved out of the hallway. Quite worryingly there were drops of what looked like blood on the kitchen floor. They were vampires though, just about indestructible creatures of the night. Patsy ignored the spots of blood and headed for the stairs.

"Well..... I did promise to look the place over while they're away." She muttered.

All the effort to tell her about a job offer from the Silver Dawn, which she'd probably dismiss out of hand. That was Laura's choice though and she had promised David she'd do her utmost to contact Laura. She walked into Laura's room and felt excited for no good reason.

"I'll just leave a note on her pillow."

The note was the same wording as the texts. Written in blue marker pen on a sheet of A4 copy paper. Patsy put the note on Laura's pillow, using the edge of a blanket to hold it in place. As she turned, she saw the folded up piece of yellowing paper on Laura's dressing table. Patsy thought she was the least nosy person in the world, though her mum would have said otherwise. Upside down notes were provocative and folded upside down notes drove her crazy.

"It might be something really private." She muttered.

The folded up paper seemed to speak to her, telling her that no one would know she'd looked at the note.

"Supposing it's something dreadful that I can't ignore?"

The nosy and inquisitive side of her personality won, it rarely lost. Patsy picked up the paper and unfolded it. A post it note had been stuck to the top corner. Simon's cursive scrawl, which was barely legible.

'Giovanni and I, drawn by the girl child. You always said you wanted to know what we'd looked like in those days. – Simon.'

The girl child? Simon had never mentioned her when he'd talked to her about his life in Italy.

Another lover? Not that it mattered, he must have loved thousands of women over the years. It struck her that the drawing in her hands had to be at least seven hundred years old.

"She had some skill..... This girl child." She muttered.

Patsy used her iPhone to take three pictures of the drawing, before refolding it and putting it back where she'd found it.

"The beards are strange, but men's clothing was better then. Very.....Rugged."

She didn't check the house any further, Simon and Clara had obviously arrived back in the country. She ignored the open crate in the lounge and let herself out of the front door.

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Akiva Yatsko was surprised that Ethiopia felt cooler than Jerusalem, much cooler. He'd have guessed at about twenty degrees and high humidity. Not that Laura would care, her vampire physiology made her a lethal fighting machine just about anywhere.

"Unless I'm set alight or frozen solid, weather doesn't bother me much." She'd once told him.

They were there, the exact point where the woman Consuela had taken her picture. The city of Dessie was behind them in the distance, with just a few rooftops to show where it lay. Quite close to them were the three ancient, crumbling pyramids.

"It can't be as bad as Walter's journal says, can it?" He asked.

"We'll soon find out and this is just the first task for the Gods. Are you feeling worthy yet Akiva?"

"Yeah, yeah..... Laugh it up vampire girl."

Despite being cool, the humidity left him feeling sticky by the time they found the hole in the largest of the pyramids. That was it, a hole. No stairs, no sign the deep dark hole was anything other than an accident created by erosion, or maybe an earthquake.

"This is it, exactly as Emily described it." Said Laura.

Foolhardy, but he felt a need to reclaim the initiative. The female vampire fighting machine was beginning to make him feel a little insecure.

"We'll need the ropes." Said Laura.

"Why?" He replied.

Akiva stepped forward and dropped into the hole. Not as brave or foolhardy as it probably looked, he had just about been able to see the floor of the chamber below. Twenty feet onto an earth floor, maybe twenty five. Quite a drop with a heavy pack on his back, but he'd dropped from higher places. His caving lamp was already on his head, ready to be turned on as he landed. A few seconds later Laura landed next to him.

"That was fun." She said. "Though getting out again will be the real trick."

"Where's your sense of adventure Laura Selway?"

"Hey, that's my saying.....No more stealing my sayings."

There was only one way to go, even if it didn't look that inviting. A large gash in the cave wall, with a steep path leading down into the darkness below. Akiva walked down the path, still listening to Laura moaning about him stealing her sayings.

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