

Quid Pro Quo

(Season three of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 9 - Duat, The Underworld

"Hope not ever to see Heaven. I have come to lead you to the other shore; into eternal darkness; into fire and into ice."

— Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*

»

Laura and Akiva followed the creature, through gaps in the rocks they'd never have found themselves. She trusted him to show them the way and not to run off. He'd extracted a promise from them in return for being their guide. He wanted to die and Laura had given her word to kill him before they left the caverns below Dessie.

"Not far now, you'll see.....Be quiet now....Very quiet." Said Liam

She found it hard to accept the creature had once been a human, a native of Quebec, with the name of Liam Gagnon. The misshapen creature with grey skin and a snout full of sharp teeth, certainly didn't look like something you'd call Liam. She'd been tempted to ask him what he'd eaten to survive, until she remembered the lack of rats and other vermin in the caverns.

"I was left here, all three of us were." He'd told them. "You can't trust Walter & Emily."

"We were beginning to realise that." Said Akiva.

"Left me here they did, Walter ordered me to remain, though it was Emily who spoke the words of the curse that binds me to this place. I was to wait here until someone came. It's been so long and this place changes you. It'll begin to change you if you stay too long."

"We found the bodies of the other two." She said.

"One of them killed them, when the monsters still roamed most of the caverns. Now they tend to keep to the cavern with the tomb. I think the monsters were once people too, before this place changed them."

"How are they changed?" Asked Akiva.

"Everything is changed into a monstrous form....Look at me! I was once top of my year at school and there was a fiancé waiting for me back home.....I know, hard to imagine now. If you're asking how it does it?.....I have no idea. You mustn't stay here long, or you'll change too."

It appeared Liam was cursed to remain forever in the caverns beyond the two massive columns they'd passed on the way in. Liam had been and still was a devout catholic, an abomination, a deformity who still believed he had a soul. Laura had found that quite touching, until he'd demanded his payment for helping them.

"Suicide is a sin, I'd lose my soul." He'd told them. "If you were sent by Walter & Emily, you've probably already reached a point well beyond redemption. I don't know what either of you are, but you move too fast to be totally human. Kill me after I help you get what you came for. I want your word to end my life, before I show you anything."

Walter had told them a guide would be waiting to fill in the gaps in the vague notes in his journal. They were to bring something out of the ground under Dessie, that was all they knew. Without help and information from Liam, it would probably be impossible to find whatever it was that Horus wanted. Laura had grudgingly given her word to kill Liam. Grudgingly because when she killed, Laura always wanted the victim to be her choice. And besides, Liam didn't look as though his blood would be worth drinking. That had all been a few hours and a long trudge through the caverns ago.

“There, look.....Not a sound once we enter the cavern with the tomb.” Said Liam.

Something was different about the cavern they were about to enter, Laura felt it in her bones, which was one of Clara’s favourite sayings. For a start the entrance had a curved arch, created out of what looked like bricks. She was no expert, but it didn’t resemble anything else they’d seen since dropping into the caves. There was something truly ancient about that arch of old clay bricks.

“If this is a trap Liam.....” She whispered.

“No.... I promise. Just keep your word when the time comes.”

They crept through the arch and much to her surprise, Liam could move as silently as her when there was a need. Through the arch and then she followed Liam, into the shadows behind the statue of what looked like a dragon. To emphasise the need for complete silence, Liam pressed his finger to where lips should have been, but was now the end of his snout.

There was light in the cavern, though only from what looked like two or three flickering oil lamps. The monsters had to be the predators called Akhetatens in the journal kept by Emily, though Laura thought of them as Akhens. Probably once human, though now they looked like monsters from the mind of Edgar Allan Poe. Skeletons with muscles was her first impression, of the creatures shuffling around a sarcophagus in the centre of the cavern. If she could have moved closer, she might have seen a body with internal organs. The way they looked though, with skeletal fingers almost brushing the ground as they walked and the skulls with row upon row of sharp teeth. They were monsters who she didn’t want to get closer to. Big too, at least twice her height. Their pace was slow and at first Laura put the humming sound down to a feature of the cavern, a breeze humming through a gap in the rocks. It was them though, the monsters reciting something as they trudged. Liam got her attention by touching her hand and his touch still felt cold, unnaturally cold. They crept out of the cavern as silently as they’d entered. No one spoke until they’d covered some distance through the ruined temple.

“They’ve been like that for a while, the constant repetitions of a litany of some kind.” Said Liam. “For years they’ve never spoken at all.”

“Do you know what they’re saying ?” Asked Akiva.

“No, but I can guarantee it’ll be nothing pleasant. I’ve no idea what God or Demon cursed this place and trapped those poor devils, but there is a feel about this place.....You must have felt it ?”

“Evil is a word I don’t use too often.....I feel evil in this place though, good old fashioned evil.” Said Laura.

“I’m guessing whatever Horus wants us to get is in the tomb they all walk around, the sarcophagus in the centre of the chamber ?” Asked Akiva.

“I can see why you’d think that and I believe Walter & Emily had no real idea where the power in this place truly lay. Get comfortable, I have to tell you about a visitor I had and the words I use are important, or so he told me.”

“Tell it slowly Liam.” Said Laura. “Your voice can be a little hard to understand.”

“Oh yes, I realise that and I will do my best. It’s those dreadful changes you see. To think I sang in the church choir when I was a boy.”

Akiva had obviously decided it was going to be an unofficial break and he was getting food and water out of his pack. Laura did the same and rested her back against the broken ruins of a statue. Once they were settled, Liam began his tale.

“As I said before, Walter & Emily left me here to meet you, though I’m certain they didn’t know what you were supposed to do. They’re a crooked pair, don’t trust them.”

“They’re dead, we communicate with them as wraiths.” Said Laura.

Poor Liam, he looked shocked and lost for words for a while.

“They deserved to die of course, but.....I travelled with them for so long. How did they die ?”

“They were trapped in the tunnels below Luxor.” Said Laura. “As far as I could tell, they ran out of food and water and simply died of thirst.”

“Thirst always kills before hunger.” Added Akiva.

“A sad end for such famous tomb robbers.” Said Liam. “Anyway.....Time is hard to keep track of down here, but I think I’d been here two or three years. There had been a few minor changes.....I still looked human then. The creatures you call the Akhens were everywhere in those days, just keeping out of their way was a nightmare. I became quite good at climbing into places they couldn’t get to. In the beginning I noticed my leg muscles getting stronger. Like a fool I thought the changes were always going to be useful and.....”

“You’ve survived Liam.” Said Laura. “The most important thing is to stay alive. Everything else is secondary.”

“Not like this though, not as a monster. Don’t forget, you gave your word to end my life.”

“I won’t forget.....Come on Liam, carry on with your tale.”

“He came to me in a tunnel I found high up in the main chamber. A rather ordinary looking man in the heavy robes and hood of a priest. When I asked, he said his name was irrelevant and that he was just a messenger. He said people would come and that I should show them the cavern with the tomb.”

“We got a weird reception for expected visitors.” Said Akiva.

“I thought there’d be more of you and you’d me more.....Once I saw how quickly Laura could move though.”

“I get the idea he didn’t think we were impressive enough.” Said Akiva.

“Ahhh.... Found unworthy yet again.”

“That joke was funny for about five seconds after you used it once.” Said Akiva.

“No insult was intended, I had been waiting for a very long time.” Said Liam. “He told me to tell you, that the tomb mustn’t be opened. He told me that no living thing could be allowed to see what was in the tomb. He said you are to destroy the tomb completely without opening it. It must be obliterated where it now stands.... Those were his words.”

“Did he mention the Akhens ?” Asked Laura.

“No, I don’t think their fate matters at all.”

“Typical.....One God sets them as guards and another gets us to obliterate them.” Said Akiva.

Laura tended to agree, but her mind was busy working on a plan to obliterate something made of solid stone and weighing several tons.

“One of my sniper rifles has a semiautomatic option.” She said. “I’ll need to test it of course on one of the Akhens. If it kills one of them, I can use it to keep them at bay. As for obliterating solid stone.....”

“That will need some thought.” Said Akiva.

“One thing is certain though Akiva. We have to open it up and look inside, before we turn it into stone dust.”

“Oh yes, definitely.”

~

~

“The frames are temporary; I will get them framed professionally.” Said Simon. “Well.....What do you think ? All drawn over seven hundred years ago, when my name was Piero Rossi.”

Patsy wasn't sure what she thought. She'd known Simon was immensely old of course, but seeing the proof of it....That was different. The clothes, the small pointy beard, the obvious age of the drawings.

"To be honest Simon, they're wonderfully drawn, but I'm a bit....Gobsmacked."

Her gob had never felt so smacked, if that made any sense at all. The frames he'd bought didn't look too bad and of course she'd seen one of the drawings before, just not officially. They looked strange on the wall of the spare bedroom, though she appreciated they could never be in the lounge. How could anyone explain having a drawing of themselves in 13th century Italy ?

"See Giovanni's boots ? Oh, those were his thing for so long, almost the love of his life. Made by a famous bootmaker who knew how to charge. They cost Giovanni as much as.....In today's money he could have bought a BMW for the price of those damn boots."

"They've caught your likeness, whoever the artist was." She said.

"I can show you the girl child, there's a self-portrait."

Simon took her to the last drawing on the wall, it was well lit by the room's single window. A drawing in ink on what had once probably been white parchment. Yellowing now, though the black ink had barely faded. A young girl, most likely looking at herself in a mirror. A face without a smile, though there was the hint of a glint in her eyes.

"She's very pretty Simon, this girl child....Did she have a name ?"

Of course she did, everyone had a given name. Patsy was feeling jealous and irritable, which didn't make sense. The girl in the self-portrait had probably been dead for centuries.

"If she had a name, I never heard mention of it. Giovanni brought her in off the streets one night, as though she was a lost kitten. He started calling her Niña, which means child in Italian. The name stuck and she became Niña to everyone who knew her."

"Was Giovanni sleeping with her ?" She asked.

"No, she had her own room, though she had the habit of falling asleep in strange places. We were vampires and assassins for the Medici when Niña lived with us. I think Giovanni saw her as his one kind act in a very wicked world. Not just him, I sometimes felt like that too."

"Did Niña know what you both were ?"

"Oh yes....And she kept our secrets. Right to the end."

Patsy could almost see the girl in the drawing, as she flitted about the home of two vampires. She probably thought of it all as an exciting kind of adventure.

"Right to the end implies she died." Said Patsy. "What killed her ?"

"There were various forms of dysentery, all labelled as the flux. I've no idea how our strange girl child caught it. It took Niña to her grave in her third year as our house guest."

"Did you think about turning her ?"

"No, that was never considered."

"Why not ?"

"Niña was too good, her soul too pure."

His expression troubled her, until the Simon cheeky grin returned to his face. Patsy didn't want to take the conversation any further, it was beginning to worry her. How did Simon view himself ? Luckily Simon had obviously finished showing her the drawings.

"You could put them in the lounge and say they're of your long dead ancestors." She said.

"Oh no, I've learned from experience. Too hard to keep the story straight, people ask too many weird questions. Far easier to keep them up here. Come on, it's Saturday and its nice and cloudy out...With luck it might rain."

“Whoopee.... Perfect vampire boyfriend weather. Where shall we go ?”

“How about the Hard Rock ? I haven’t been there for a burger since.....I think it was seventy eight.”

“Eighteen seventy eight ?” She asked.

“Cheeky.”

“Seventeen seventy eight ?”

They had a tickling fight that lasted all the way down the stairs. They ended up on the sofa in the lounge, right in front of the crates she’d deliberately avoided mentioning when arriving that morning. They snogged like teens for a while, until she had to ask.

“Why do you have packing cases in the lounge Simon ?”

“They wouldn’t fit in the cupboard under the stairs.”

She playfully thumped him in the chest.

“Alright.....They were a payment for the favour we did for Judith. The people who once owned the crates were famous tomb robbers. Anything could be in the crates.....Maybe dangerous things.”

“So you and Clara put them in your lounge.”

“As I said..... They didn’t fit under the stairs.” Said Simon.

“Yeah.....Yeah....I can understand the temptation to open them.” She said. “How potentially dangerous are we talking about ?”

“Nothing that bad so far, but we have only opened two crates.”

She could tell by the way he was sitting on the edge of the sofa, completely ignoring her charms.

Simon wouldn’t take much persuasion to open another crate.

“While we’re here.....We could just pop the lid off one of them.” She said.

“That isn’t a good idea Patsy. Walter and Emily Couzinier owned the contents of these crates and if you knew their reputation. Plus, with no one here to back me up.....”

“I can back you up.” She yelled. “What’s the worst that can happen ? If you burst into flames I can call the fire brigade to come and put you out.”

“You wouldn’t joke about that if you’d seen what I’ve seen.”

“Come on Simon, where’s your sense of adventure ?”

“You sound just like Laura.”

“Just one box.....Please.” She pleaded.

“Alright.....You choose which one.”

She tried not to leap off the sofa and look too excited, but she was that excited. As she looked along the line of crates, one already had the top opened up. Inside there was the unmistakable glint of gold.

“Is all this legal Simon ?” She asked. “Is it alright to have whatever is in these crates ?”

“No, of course not.....Come on pick a crate. I’ve set my heart on a burger and the Hard Rock must have changed since seventy eight.”

“I wouldn’t bet on that.”

There was lettering on the crates and one had Walter 45 burned into the top. For some reason that particular crate intrigued her.

“This one.” She said.

Simon rummaged on the shelf under the coffee table, the sort of place where people put coffee table books they’d never got around to reading. Instead of a huge tome on cooking with tofu, Simon had a pry bar in his hand.

“Right.....I’ll have the top off in seconds.”

“No, I want to do it..... You can move the box away from the wall for me though.”

Patsy wasn't a pry bar virgin, she'd opened up a great many crates at Hayle's Motor Factors. Usually boxes full of wiper blades or oil filters. She was hoping the crate in front of her might contain something more exciting than wiper blades for Skoda cars.

"Do I get to keep what I find?" She asked.

"Depends.....And don't damage any packing materials. The drawings of me were in one crate, scrunched up and used as padding for the gold statuette of a cat. Some say the Couzinier were eccentric. Personally I'd call them Batshit crazy.....Just don't throw anything away."

"I won't.....Promise."

Patsy was more cautious than when opening boxes of car spares. It didn't take her long though, to have the lid in her hands. There was a layer of scrunched up paper. She carefully removed one piece and flattened it out on the coffee table.

"It looks like junk mail, foreign junk mail." She said. "I suppose not everything we find is going to be worth a fortune."

"Junk mail in Arabic, I recognise a few words. Probably added by Judith's people as an extra layer of padding."

She scooped out the balls of scrunched up junk mail, placing it all on the coffee table. Beneath it was something that glinted in the light from the windows.

"Gold.....It's something made of gold." She said.

"Doesn't surprise me, Judith said Walter and Emily had a thing about gold."

"Who doesn't? That must have been one hell of a favour you did for Judith."

"It was.....Come on, I'm hungry. Take whatever it is out of the box." Said Simon.

The crate was quite big. She'd have probably just about fitted into it, if she curled herself up into a ball. The gold statuette filled most of the crate and was probably entirely made of gold. She got a good hold, but it didn't budge an inch. She looked at Simon.

"Gimme a hand, this thing weighs a ton."

Together they lifted the statue out of the box and placed it on the carpet. Even Simon, who usually tried to never look amazed at anything, looked shocked at their find.

"I never knew the Egyptians created anything like this." She said.

"Oh, they loved their strange beasts." Said Simon. "Ask Laura about what she saw in Luxor."

Patsy didn't want to say the words dragon, but the rear of the creature created out of gold was definitely a large reptile with wings.

"It is isn't it Simon....I'm not going crazy am I? It's the body of a dragon with the head of a lion. I didn't know they ever made statues of dragons."

"To them it was probably a winged lizard."

"That is a dragon's body Simon....I know a dragon statue when I see one."

It happened when she was looking straight at Simon. The head moved slightly, the lion's head definitely turned in her direction.

"Did you see that?" She asked. "It moved.... The head moved."

"We're both excited....Come on, let's go and get that burger. We can look at the statue properly when we get back."

"Alright, you're more than likely right.....Low blood sugar probably."

As they went out of the door, she was behind Simon. There was that moment when she pulled the door to. Patsy would have sworn to it in a court of law. Just before the door closed, when the gap was barely large enough to see through. The head of the statue looked straight at her.

~

~

Liz had mentioned there might be side effects from the powers she needed to unleash, so meeting at Mabina's house seemed sensible. The large house in Chelsea had several thousand bodies under the concrete in the basement and it had been home to two vampires for a very long time. Logically if anywhere was already a focus for all sorts of dark energy, it was Mabina's house. In a way it was pre-infested with unnatural powers and unlikely to be made worse by anything Liz might do.

"We need to double check the list." Said Liz.

The furniture had been pushed back against the walls in Mabina's seldom used lounge. The floor was covered in everything about to go into packs, pockets or be carried. As all three of them had preternatural strength, they could carry a lot of weight.

"No matter how often I look at it, that's still a hell of a lot of things to carry into hell." Said Mabina.

"For the hundredth time, Duat isn't hell." Said Liz.

Clara was ignoring both of them and letting them get on with their squabbles. Liz was in a mood because Brendan still wasn't talking to her. Mabina had a bad mood because going with them would probably mean the end of her career at the local hospital. Nurses who vanish without notice tend to become unemployable, especially if they do it twice. Clara carried on ticking items off the list they'd all agreed on.

"It would be nice if someone packed as I tick the list." She said.

"I still don't see why we need so much rope." Said Mabina.

"We all agreed the list." Snapped Liz.

"That was before I saw it all spread out on my lounge carpet."

Clara was fed up with being the adult who talked sense. She had that role all the time with Laura and quite a lot of the time with Simon. Being the rebellious trouble causing, shouty person usually looked much more fun.

"Your choice Mabina." Said Clara. "We either pack everything and begin the journey, or we can stay here for hours arguing over every stupid fucking thing. Which is it to be?"

"I was only asking.....Sometimes I can't say a thing without having my head bitten off." Said Mabina.

Liz looked at her and winked. Clara couldn't resist smiling back and laughing.

"Oh Mabina, don't ever stop being you." Said Liz.

"Did I mention this trip will probably mean losing my job?"

"Yes Mabina, at least fifty times since we arrived." Said Clara.

Lights, ropes, climbing equipment; it all needed to be packed away. The real trick was going to be in packing the things they needed in a hurry, at the top. As per Liz, all the weapons they were taking were large, heavy and looked like something that belonged in a museum. That was partly because many of them had been recently stolen from museums and private collections of antique weaponry.

"According to Wiremi no modern weapons will be of use to us." Liz had told them. "Even explosives and the cordite in bullets will fail....We'll be using heavy edged weapons, the heavier the better."

Mabina alone was going to carry a weapon strung across her back that hadn't been acquired by theft. She had a heavy sword, more of a claymore than a standard longsword. She claimed to have owned it for over a thousand years and that it had been forged by undead smiths. As with much of what Mabina claimed to be true, Clara took it with a huge pinch of salt.

"Spare battery packs can go at the bottom, we shouldn't need them for a while." Said Liz.

Liz had spotted a huge battle axe online, it's truly amazing how useful Google is to the modern day anarchist. In a private collection, until Clara had helped her obtain it. Supposedly the axe that Eric Bloodaxe the famous Viking warrior, had used in the battle to capture York. Unless Eric had been superhuman, Clara doubted if the axe had ever done more than look impressive leaning against the

wall of Eric's house. Liz could swing it around with ease, but the damn thing had to weigh at least four hundred pounds.

"I think we should take another medical kit." Said Mabina.

"Great, if you can find a gap for it." Said Clara.

Clara had decided to take her Janbiya with her and strap an antique scimitar to her back. The weapon had just about the sharpest blade she'd ever run her finger across. All three of them were also carrying a good and mixed array of weapons in pockets, or attached to belts.

"No, the bags of salt need to be in my pack and at the top." Said Liz. "There's no telling when they might be needed."

Liz was the key to it all, the only one of them who understood how they were going to find the first of the twenty one gates to access the underworld. For someone who liked to be in control, relying on Liz worried her. Deep down Clara knew it explained her own irritability.

"Everything on the list is ticked off and packed....Somewhere." Said Liz. "I guarantee we'll have put something important at the bottom.....But for better or worse, we're ready to go."

"And once we go, there's no coming back?" Asked Mabina.

"There will be places where we can get to the surface, but no....I can't bring us back here." Said Liz.

"Can I say for all of us.....Fuck!" Said Clara. "Let's do this before I change my mind."

Even with so much carried on her back, Clara was pleased with how well she could still walk. She tried a few twists and bends and decided she'd be able to fight carrying all her equipment, but not against multiple attackers. Mabina seemed to be copying her, even trying a few lunges.

"Are you both ready?" Asked Liz.

"No." Said Mabina.

"Good, I'll begin intoning the litany."

Clara moved closer to Liz and Mabina did the same. The words of the litany were in a language she didn't understand, though she instinctively knew some words were words of power. As Liz spoke them, the floor of the room began to tremble, then shudder as though there was an earthquake.

"Brace yourselves." Said Liz.

Clara bent her knees slightly as the floor vanished and they fell into what felt like nothingness. There really had been no need to brace herself, there was no hard or sudden landing. They slowed down as they fell, until Clara barely felt her feet meet the ground. Suddenly they were in complete darkness.

"Turn your lights on." Said Clara.

A decision had been made to avoid the usual sort of caving light fixed to helmets. Having lighting that bobbed about with every movement of the head, was written off as too annoying. Mainly because of the way Mabina described her experiences with such lights. Instead they each had a lamp fixed to a strap on their chest, with a battery pack hanging off their belt. The idea was to provide a more stable and less erratic form of lighting. As Clara turned her light on, she wasn't very impressed with their surroundings.

"Well..... This is a bit....." She Began.

"Grubby and squalid." Said Mabina. "Where are we?.....Geographically I mean?"

"I have no idea." Said Liz. "Some of the gateways aren't even in what we'd call our reality. We are on our way to Duat after all, the underworld of the ancients."

"Wonderful.....This looks like an old mine." Said Mabina.

"It might well be an old mine. I can feel the first gateway, it's not far." Said Liz.

"You mentioned there were exits in places Liz, ways to the surface." Said Clara.

“Yes, but not all of them would be wise to use.....The surface might not be in a place or reality where you’d choose to be.”

“Wonderful....Now she tells us.” Said Mabina.

The dusty and rubble strewn mining tunnel, led them to a cave which looked to have been dug into by the miners, perhaps even by accident. A perfectly smooth dome rose to some height above their heads.

“That must be it.” Said Liz. “Yes.....I can feel it calling out to me.”

“It’s like Stonehenge.” Said Clara.

It really was like Stonehenge, lots of upright stones topped with lintels. More damage than Stonehenge though, few of the lintels were still in place and most of the upright stones had toppled over.

“All the outer rings of stones are nonsense, added later by whatever people found this cave.” Said Liz. “The gateway in the centre is timeless and almost indestructible.”

Two huge uprights, a good thirty to forty feet high and made of a stone which had a faint blueish colour. With the lintel on the top, they formed a perfect doorway....A gateway.

“Do we just walk between the stones ?” Asked Mabina.

“As if it could be that easy.” Said Liz. “The poor wretches who added the circles of stones probably tried to use the gateway for millennia and always failed. With enough time and the right knowledge.....who knows. But I am the keeper of the last gate, the Unnamed. We can pass through the gate with ease..... Keep close to me.”

There was a glow of light and Liz vanished. For a moment Clara thought she might have been left behind. But no, all three of them were standing on a hillside in the poor light of dusk. Behind them stood the gateway, though the mine and ruined stone circles were no longer there. At the bottom of the hill, were what looked like a group of warriors.

“Some gates will be guarded.” Said Liz. “Others will be in the territory of those who are just warlike by disposition. I think these people are in the latter group.”

“So we will fight.” Said Clara.

All three of them dropped their packs and readied their weapons, as the unknown warriors ran up the hill towards them.

~ ~

“How often have you been here ?” Whispered Akiva.

“A few times....Mainly for ammunition. Better quality than my guy in London can get hold of and of course it’s free.”

Laura made straight for the area between the racking shelves where she’d seen what they’d come for. An American army supply base in North Michigan, one of her regular places to obtain munitions without paying for them.

“Are there cameras to avoid ?” Whispered Akiva.

“No, I’ve looked the place over quite a few times. The nearest guards are at the front gate, so there’s no need to whisper. We could probably hold a rave in here and get away with it.”

Akiva was looking around, still looking nervous. She’d been through it herself, the feeling that it couldn’t be that easy. He’d even had that jaw dropping moment when she’d told him what she intended to steal and where they were going to steal it from.

“They must have regular patrols Laura ?”

In truth there had been one patrol, while she’d been acquiring a few items at a base in Texas, but she’d sensed the guard and his dog long before they were too close for comfort. It was one of the

things vampires were good at, sensing where food was, where humans were. She decided not to be totally truthful with Akiva.

“No, never.....Look...Break through the perimeter fence and you’ll quickly be met with deadly force to stop you getting any further. They work to the assumption that anyone inside the perimeter must be alright. No cameras in here, no listening devices, no movement detectors. All that crap is on the other side of the fence.....Honest. I was as shocked as you when I first came here.”

“How did you hear about this place ?”

“My usual supplier knows a man, who knows a man.....You know ?”

“No, I don’t know.”

She ignored the implied question. One of Tom’s suppliers was a store’s manager in the American army. He had the luxury of possessing the right keys and passes. Tom had passed on a few anecdotes about how much ordnance simply vanished out of US army warehouses every year.

“My guy says they don’t know what they’ve got most of the time.” Tom had told her. “Did you read in the papers about the missing plutonium ? Plutonium Laura.....Shit !”

She suspected the army weren’t tasked with keeping plutonium in a prefabricated warehouse in Michigan, but she hadn’t wanted to interrupt Tom and his story. Not that any details of Tom or his contacts were going to be passed on to Akiva. Just in case he became an enemy again one day. She hadn’t even told him what she wanted for winning the contest to capture Liam. He could sweat a little for a while.

“Christ !” Said Akiva.

“Yes, enough to leave a hole where half of Michigan used to be.”

There it was on the floor between two rows of metal shelving. Several pallets loaded with C-4 explosives, thoughtfully packaged into boxes that were easy to carry. It had amused her before to see someone had put a ‘Toxic, not to be eaten,’ label on each box. No doubt someone in the past had decided to see what C-4 tasted like.

“Well..... That will get the job done.” Said Akiva. “How much do we need ?”

“Overkill.....Half of what’s here. Some inside, some outside and packed around the tomb. If we bring down the entire chamber.....That’s fine with me.”

“Sniffer dogs love this stuff, you can’t take it to my place.....Explosives in East Jerusalem ! Half the Israeli army will be coming through the door.”

“We’ll take them straight back to Liam’s den.”

“It’s a pity we couldn’t bring him here.....All those years stuck in those caves.”

“I did consider that.” She said. “Bringing him here using the egg might have broken the curse. On the other hand, he might have ended up as a bloody mess on the floor. Safest to leave him where he is. Come on, time to put gloves on, just in case our prints are on records somewhere. The US army might have crap stock control, but they will notice that half their C-4 has gone missing.”

“Didn’t they once lose a few pounds of plutonium ?”

“Don’t you start.”

“What ?”

~ ~