

Clara Copley

(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 22 – The Invocation

“Gen had been warned by Nathalie that a helicopter would bring Maximillian Romero to the compound. Nothing can really prepare anyone for a large and noisy military helicopter arriving while they’re still trying to wake up and have breakfast. After a bit of hovering, the pilot landed right in the centre of the compound.”

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Tim listened to Thomas intone the words of the invocation and none of it made sense to him. On the other hand that didn't matter, as long as Choronzon heard and understood. It worried him that there was no protection from the deity, who some considered to be a demon. If the being they were invoking wanted to, he, or it, could rip them all apart. There was even a slight chance that he'd then harm those living in the stately home above them. When Old Thomas finished speaking, it felt as though a static charge of electricity was filling the room.

“I've read my part in the invocation, now it's up to you three.” Said Thomas. “All those attending the invocation need to speak the final paragraph. It needs to be read quickly, without unnecessary delay.”

“See.....I told you he was sneaky.” Said Adelaide. “Stop this insanity and let Thomas spend eternity as a wraith.”

“We owe Thomas a lot.....Speak the words.” Said Laura.

“Now I think about it, I'm not sure I want to.” Said Adelaide. “Anyway, none of us can probably read it.”

“I can feel my opportunity slipping away.” Said Thomas. “That paragraph is in the Latin alphabet. Understanding it isn't required; just speak it how it looks; that will do. I beg you.....Read the final paragraph.”

Laura respected the owner of the Red Rose, but Tim had always felt a slight distaste for Adelaide Ducombe. He had no clear idea why, but the feeling had grown since he'd been a vampire. He grabbed Adelaide by the back of her neck; in a none too gentle way.

“Read it Adelaide, or this old lair might be your tomb.” Said Tim.

“I agree with Tim, we've come too far together to betray Thomas now.” Said Laura. “Read the last paragraph and read it well. Mess it up deliberately and there will be consequences.”

“Well really.....If it means that much to you.” Said Adelaide. “I shall read the codex, but Nathalie will hear how you threatened me.”

“Time is running out.....Please hurry.” Said Thomas.

Adelaide read the words, which sounded alright to Tim, though he had no idea what she'd said.

Laura read the last paragraph of the invocation and there was a definite chill in the air in Laura's old lair.

“Just Tim now.” Said Thomas.

Tim was worried that he might get it wrong and thereby condemn Thomas to be thrown into the abyss. He had no definite idea what that entailed, but the way Laura had spoken about it, it had to

be bad. The time for words and worries was over; Tim read the paragraph as best he could. His reading of it felt right, he even understood parts of it, which should have been impossible.

"Thank you all, I can feel Choronzon is on his way." Said Thomas.

The ground shook a little, just enough to make them sure the being known as Choronzon was on his way. Tim knew that many had successfully invoked the deity and had stood before him. The Journal of Elias Albrecht mentioned a few of the successful invocations and Adelaide could read the journal. As for the times the deity turned up, but was displeased? Those occasions seemed to end up with a lot of pain, misery and death.

"Prepare to look upon the face of a God." Said Thomas. "Choronzon dweller in the abyss, is here."

He was tall, so tall that he had to crouch a little to fit into the lair. Choronzon had horns, clawed hands and a pair of small wings, which looked too small to get him into the air. He looked more like a demon than a deity, but Tim had learned to stop judging things and people by how they looked.

"Old Thomas!" Said Choronzon. "I thought I knew the voice dragging me away from the underworld. So, you found others willing to help you? I take it you wish to ask me for a little more life?"

"I am not greedy my Lord, just a few years would enable me to finish so much." Said Thomas.

Adelaide gave a huge sigh, which the deity didn't react to. For someone dragged away from his kingdom by two vampires, a mortal female and a dead occultist; Choronzon seemed in a remarkably good mood.

"Luckily you called me here on a good day." Said Choronzon. "I have no displeasure at the idea of helping you. I can give you many years of new life, but not decades. There will be differences between your life and life born from the womb, you'll notice them as you go along. Be careful about who you let get close to you Thomas, especially women. They will most assuredly notice those differences. You won't be able to father children, but you should be able to live a relatively normal life. Does that interest you?"

"It does my Lord, that's more than I'd hoped for." Said Thomas.

Choronzon merely touched Thomas, a gently stroke of a clawed hand over the dead occultist's cheek. Tim could instantly sense the change in Thomas, from being dead, to being sort of alive. Tim had no urge to feed on Thomas, which was strange. He had a constant mild and controllable urge to feed on most humans. Thomas wasn't quite human, but he seemed happy with whatever he was now; it was definitely better than being dead.

"Are you happy with how you are now?" Asked Choronzon.

"Yes, thank you Lord.....I can breathe again; my heart beats in my chest again." Said Thomas.

"Good, but never invoke me again, for any reason." Said the deity. "I would be very displeased."

"No, I would never do that my Lord." Said Thomas.

Old Thomas hadn't suddenly looked young again, but he looked like a man heading towards the wrong side of being middle aged. Some might still call him old, but it would be a cruel insult. His skin had a glow to it; he had a sparkle in his eyes. Thomas may have gone through a lot to get a few years of life, but he looked good on it. Choronzon turned away from Thomas.

"I'm feeling generous, but what do I find." Said Choronzon. "Two vampires; Satan's favourite children. You've already received the help and blessing of several of the Ancient Gods. I see a mortal with you though, a female who has travelled a long hard road to get here. Adelaide I heard them calling you.....Name a gift quickly Adelaide and if it's within my power; you shall have it."

It seemed incredibly unfair, but Tim wasn't about to argue with deity known to react badly to being displeased. Laura caught his eye and winked. Adelaide being rewarded for taking part in an invocation she'd wanted to wreck. Sometimes the world really was crazy.

“Quickly Adelaide.....Time is ticking away.” Said Choronzon.

“I know it’s a predictable request, but I’d like wealth.” Said Adelaide. “My main restaurant in Jerusalem has required refurbishment for a while. I’d also like to open a Red Rose in several major cities around the world. I’d like my gift to be wealth, serious wealth.”

Choronzon laughed, a long and genuine sounding laugh. Tim was wondering if he’d see what the deity did to those who displeased him. It seemed Adelaide had caught the deity on a very good day.

“Why not ? I asked and you named what you need.” Said Choronzon. “In a few days, you will receive the gift you asked for.”

“Thank you my Lord.” Said Adelaide, while bowing.

A little bit of sucking up Tim thought, but it looked like Adelaide would soon be wealthy, very wealthy. In the same situation he’d have probably done some sucking up too. Choronzon vanished instantly, without saying a word. It was strange to see Thomas stood there, pretty much the way he’d looked in his mansion in Northern France. He looked younger, which was even weirder.

Adelaide had a smile which seemed to fill the room.

“For years I’ve wanted to add a few hotel quality rooms to the Red Rose.” Said Adelaide. “Now I’ll be able to do it.”

“I’m very pleased for you.” Said Laura.

“We’ve had our differences, but you looked after us in Jerusalem.” Said Tim. “I’m glad you were here today to have a few dreams come true.”

“It’ll take a while to feel real.” Said Adelaide.

“I need a favour.” Said Thomas. “I have several homes in many places. I would appreciate it if your Gudara could take me to one of them, Laura.”

“Of course.” Said Laura.

As Laura moved, Tim thought she was going to hug Adelaide. Instead she gave Thomas a long face to face hug.

“Then I’ll take Nathalie the journal, the codex....And the Hand.” Said Laura.

“After that I fancy a long break somewhere hot and sunny.” Said Tim. “I think we’ve earned it.”

Adelaide was looking decidedly agitated for a woman who’d probably soon be a millionaire.

“No, No.....See Nathalie, but then we need to deal with Jerome, head of the Esoteric Wisdom Group.” Said Adelaide.

“You mean deal with as in removing him from the land of the living ?” Asked Tim.

“I do.....We need to kill the bastard before he kills us.”

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Gen had been warned by Nathalie that a helicopter would bring Maximillian Romero to the compound. Nothing can really prepare anyone for a large and noisy military helicopter arriving while they’re still trying to wake up and have breakfast. After a bit of hovering, the pilot landed right in the centre of the compound. If their neighbours weren’t curious and a little perturbed before, they were now. The noise was deafening until the pilot cut the engine. Even then the smell of aviation fuel filled the compound.

“Wow, that’s the way to make an entrance.” Said Akiva.

All three of them were sat in what passed for a kind of mess hall. Her, Akiva and Sophia, the three people who had been through so much in such a short period of time. There had been a rumour that Westcott Villa had been burned to the ground shortly after they’d left. It hadn’t been them, so it might have been someone paid for by the Silver Dawn. It was a good way to get rid of any forensic evidence to what had gone on there. It was a strange villa though; Gen was happy to believe just

about anything. The rumours became fact when a local radio station mentioned the villa going up in flames. There was no mention of it being deliberate. Luckily the windows gave them a good view of the courtyard.

"There he is, the man in the ten grand suit in Ethiopia." Said Sophia. "The very dapper Maximillian Romero, who likes to be called Max."

Gen saw a man awkwardly clamber out of the helicopter. He looked totally out of place. It was difficult to think where he'd look like he belonged. Maybe Royal Ascot, or in a blazer at Henley Regatta.

"Why do you hate him, Sophia?" Asked Gen.

"I don't want to muddy the water, you need him." Said Sophia. "For all I know you'll end up liking Max; he can be extremely charming when he wants to be."

"The man is stood right there, looking lost." Said Akiva. "Let's go and welcome him to the compound."

They piled out of the building and across a few yards of hard packed ground and dust. Max still seemed to be arguing with the pilot about what was, and wasn't to be unloaded with him. A tall thin woman stood and watched, while looking awkward.

"Hi, you must be Max." Said Gen.

"Yeah, I thought you'd be behind a desk in Washington by now." Said Sophia.

"I heard you were here, Sophia." Said Max. "You'll be pleased to hear I brought Anne Roberts as a replacement."

"A replacement.....I don't understand." Said Sophia.

"Nathalie is picking up all the bills." Said Max. "The helicopter will take you to a top private clinic just over the border in Kenya. There are good clinics here, but you three have been causing a few ripples. Nathalie wants you safely out of Ethiopia until you're fully healed."

"But I thought.....The wounds have stopped bleeding." Said Sophia.

"He's right; you need to get those claw wounds treated." Said Akiva. "If you don't the scars will get harder and harder to remove."

"He's right and Nathalie is paying." Said Gen.

"Of course, I dread looking in a mirror." Said Sophia. "It's missing seeing gold created by alchemy.....Pure gold. Take lots of pictures for me."

"We will, I promise." Said Gen.

"It won't take me long to pack." Said Sophia.

Gen kept changing her mind about Sophia, but on the whole; she'd miss the ex-CIA operative. As for the replacement? A little info early on was the name of the game.

"You must be hungry after your trip." Said Gen.

"And in need of coffee." Added Akiva. "We were in the middle of breakfast and the food here is incredible."

"Now you mention it.....Coffee would be nice." Said Max.

Akiva in front they headed towards the dining room. Gen gave it about ten paces before asking Anne Roberts about herself.

"So Anne, is this your first time in Ethiopia?" Asked Gen.

"No, my father is an archaeologist." Said Anne. "He used to bring me on digs here when I was quite young."

"We're lucky to get Anne." Said Max. "She's actually written a book about Samuel Westcott."

"That is good news." Said Gen.

Oh great, the new arrival would know more about Westcott and alchemy than her. Gen didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

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One of the doctors had told Niña that it looked like a sword had gone into one side of Ronnie's abdomen and out of the other. Surprisingly that type of wound was rare in North London, but not unknown.

"You can buy samurai style blades online." The doctor had said. "It's terrifying when you think about it."

They'd kept to the same story about a girl's night out going terribly wrong. How they'd met a few guys in a bar who seemed so nice, until one had pulled a knife and attacked what appeared to be a rival gang. The hospital staff had nodded; it seemed that too wasn't unknown. Mabina working for the NHS helped their creditability, but one of the doctors must have called the police. It didn't help that they weren't exactly dressed for a girl's night out. Niña had several scratches on her face and her jacket had been ripped. If anything, Mabina looked worse than her. They'd also headed for the hospital in such a rush that they still had their packs. Niña wasn't sure how incriminating some of the contents might be. It was a shambles and as she'd said to Mabina, more than once.

"I know we're going to end up in prison."

"I've left messages for Clara.....We'll be alright." Mabina had replied, several times.

No one had asked them not to leave, but the nurses had been looking at them and whispering among themselves. It wasn't a surprise when two plain clothes detectives arrived, with three uniformed officers. The same doctor had seen them several times and he'd always sounded quite positive about Ronnie making a full recovery. According to one of the detectives, he'd told the police a different story.

"A sword wound that deep and right through her abdomen." Said the detective. "Infection has had time to make the matter worse. Your friend may not survive."

He was probably trying to scare them and it was working. Niña was still wary of saying too much, so she unconsciously reverted to babble.

"It's Ronnie.....Ronnie can't die, she's my friend." Said Niña.

They'd been separated, but so far at least, there'd been no talk about taking them to the police station. Niña looked at her backpack at her feet and remembered that it contained a ten inch, blue steel assassin's blade. Things could turn very bad, very quickly. Mabina was there, not that far away, taking to the other detective. Having her to smile at her helped, it helped a lot. The detective in front of her was rummaging through his notebook.

"Let me see.....Veronica Neophytou." Said the detective. "Your friend is known to us and trust me, her wounds could be fatal. I get the feeling you're not taking the situation seriously."

He'd see how serious she was if she chose to fight her way out. He had their correct names though and Mabina had told them about working for the NHS. Violence was a tempting way to resolve the situation, but all their lives would unravel, including Clara's. Plus, at the back of her mind she remembered Simon calling the police the Van Helsings.

"You never fight the Van Helsings." He'd told her. "They have the biggest gang in town."

The detective wanted her to describe those who'd been involved in the fight. If she started describing the warriors in the pyramid, he'd probably recommend her being sedated and placed in the psychiatric ward. It was an impossible situation, so she acted confused and upset; which wasn't totally an act. Niña put her head in her hands.

"Ronnie is my best friend.....She can't die." She said.

Her hand went into her pack and she found the blade before she found a bottle of water. So tempting to use the blade, but it was the water she brought out of her pack. The detective was sat near her; smiling and unaware how close he'd come to death.

"Always nice to have a little background on a victim." Said the detective. "You'd be amazed how often it sets us looking in the right direction. What does Veronica do for a living these days?"

"Ronnie, she likes to be called Ronnie." Said Niña.

She felt Clara arrive long before she saw or heard her. Everything would be alright now that Clara was there, in the hospital. Clara knew people according to Mabina, important people.

"I asked.....What does Ronnie do for a living?" Asked the detective.

"She works for her." Said Niña, nodding in the direction of Clara.

There was a man in a suit with Clara and he was talking to the detective who'd been interrogating Mabina. That detective was looking quite nervous and almost bowing to the man in the suit. Niña's detective went over to his colleague and he too seemed to become very nervous. Clara left them to talk and came over and sat in the chair next to her. Clara held her hand.

"I'm so sorry Niña, blame it on baby brain." Said Clara. "I will never forgive myself if Ronnie doesn't make it. We can go and see her for a moment, but then I'm sure you'll want to go home."

"Yes please, I want to make coffee, look at the screens and tickle Justin." Said Niña.

"Just wait a few seconds for the detectives to leave." Said Clara.

"Who is the man you arrived with?" Asked Niña.

"He is the boss of their boss." Said Clara. "Cyril has a lot of dirt on him. It's all done in a friendly way, but Cyril could finish his career. Ahh, the detectives are leaving, we can see Ronnie."

"Does Cyril have the dirt on a lot of people?" Asked Niña.

"A huge number.....You'd be amazed." Said Clara.

Mabina was already there, holding Ronnie's hand. Ronnie was lucky; she was in a single occupancy room. She was asleep, but Niña could sense that her heartbeat was strong and regular. There was a nurse near the window, looking as though she'd been hit with a fairly gentle thrall spell. She wasn't going to remember much about what was done, or said.

"Ronnie will probably live, though she'll have one hell of a scar." Said Mabina.

"I am so sorry, Mabina." Said Clara. "I've inadvertently caused all three of you so many problems. I will make it up to you in some way, I promise."

"I can guess what you seek in the locked off rooms." Said Mabina. "Take me with you and Niña if she wishes to go. Once you've resolved all those feelings, get Tempest to seal the sealed off rooms forever. He'll like that; he's not really into rescuing the occasional group of explorers."

"I want to go, but right now.....I want to go home." Said Niña.

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Adelaide Ducombe had wanted dropping off in Jerusalem by Laura's Gudara. They'd taken her right into her office at the restaurant, the Red Rose. Laura's Gudara had already taken Thomas to a small place he had in Portugal. After that he'd have to get used to travelling by trains and planes; just like everyone else. Adelaide seemed more interested in working out how to spend her promised wealth, than killing Jerome.

"Tim and I will clean up a bit, before seeing Nathalie." Said Laura. "After that we have to go after Jerome. As you said, he will definitely be coming after us."

"Tomorrow, I've neglected my business while away." Said Adelaide. "Come for me around midday tomorrow and we'll start seeking out Jerome. I've a few ideas on where to start."

Laura had her own ideas and as far as she was concerned, she was still Nathalie's go-to person on such matters. There was going to be friction, but on the whole; she still quite liked Adelaide.

"Midday tomorrow it is then." Said Laura.

"Any messages for Nathalie ?" Asked Tim.

"Just that it'd be nice to see her in Jerusalem once in a while." Said Adelaide.

Her Gudara went through the routine which had once amazed Laura, but now felt almost routine.

Adelaide's office dropped away below them and a field in Brittany seemed to rush in from both sides. He was still dropping them off outside the Silver Dawn headquarters, until he could be trusted not to arrive naked. Laura held her Gudara's hand before he left. It was something she used to do quite regularly, but hadn't done for a while.

"Thank you.....I really couldn't have completed Nathalie's task without you." She said.

"Yeah, we really appreciate you buddy." Added Tim.

Her Gudara made a gurgling noise in his throat and patted her shoulder, before literally vanishing.

"A man of few words." Said Tim.

Laura had to chuckle, Tim had described her Gudara perfectly. She should have had him drop them closer. The edge of the field was muddy. Their boots were muddy by the time they walked through the front door of the Silver Dawn headquarters. She was exempted most security checks, but not all of them. Nathalie was expecting trouble. Then again, Nathalie was always expecting trouble.

"A visit to the refectory, or straight to see Nathalie ?" Asked Laura.

"It has to be the refectory.....The food is too good to be ignored." Said Tim.

Of course Nathalie would spot them tucking into a full breakfast and several cups of coffee. A young woman Laura had never seen before told them not to rush, but see Nathalie before leaving. They waited until she was out of earshot, before the conjecture started.

"What do you reckon ?" Tim asked. "A new PA now that Gen has gone out into the field."

"No, she hasn't got the Nathalie twitch, or at least not yet." Said Laura. "You might be right.....I'm still a little hurt that Gen never joined us."

"We're just too mad, bad and dangerous to know." Said Tim.

Laura had a humble and very worn backpack, to hold the three priceless items that Tim and her had acquired for the Silver Dawn. Acquired for Nathalie really, Laura didn't like the idea of working for a faceless organisation. After eating they went round to Nathalie's office and were instantly ushered into her presence. She was keen to see them, her heart rate climbed the instant she saw the pack.

"Adelaide called me to say you'd been successful." Said Nathalie.

Tim sat down to watch the show as Laura pulled something wrapped in bubble wrap out of the pack.

It was just about possible to see it was a hand, crafted out of some kind of metal.

"The Hand of Albrecht." Said Laura, placing it on the desk. "Wrapped because touching it can produce strange effects in certain people. You really need experts to get to work on everything....Before you touch the hand."

Nathalie picked up the Hand, after looking at it for a few seconds. Her fingers were kept away from the bare metal by a good inch of bubble wrap.

"Thank you, Laura.....And Tim of course." Said Nathalie. "Did you find the journal of Albrecht to go with it ?"

"We did." Said Laura. "Again you'll need experts to properly examine it. It's not dangerous, but the pages are bound together in no sensible order. The journal tells you how to use the Hand, but the Codex enables you to safely pick it up with bare hands,"

"Show them to me, put them on the desk." Said Nathalie.

Laura put the journal on the table, still open at the section on how to use the Hand. Even if Nathalie could read it, she wouldn't be able to touch the Hand.

"The journal." Said Laura.

"Is it safe to touch?" Asked Nathalie.

"Yes." Said Laura.

Nathalie Aurigny touched the journal as if it might shatter at the lightest of touch. She fondled the pages and Laura had the impression that Nathalie's concern with the Hand and its associated documents, was more than purely academic interest. They were important to her. Laura put the Codex on the desk, which had recently been a vital part of invoking a deity.

"Lastly the Codex." Said Laura. "Definitely genuine, we used it to invoke Choronzon. Again, I recommend that your experts look it over, before you attempt to use it. In theory the Codex can render the Hand safe to touch, and.....That's it, everything we found."

The three items on the table enabled their possessor to totally control someone, anyone, even a large group of people. That made them priceless, without counting the numerous pages of words of power in the Codex. Nathalie could sell the Hand and have enough to buy Brittany.....She could have bought just about anywhere on the globe she wanted to buy.

"I take if you left many grudges and bodies behind, recovering these items?" Asked Nathalie.

"With respect.....You can't make an omelette etc." Said Tim.

"Indeed you can't Tim." Said Nathalie. "You both have my sincere thanks and don't worry.....You will receive a suitable reward in due course."

It felt like being dismissed, but Laura understood. Nathalie had been given the best present in the entire world, but she couldn't use it until experts had made it safe. It was like being given your favourite gadget, without the batteries. They left that part of the Silver Dawn headquarters and headed for their personal apartment at the rear of the building.

"She seemed a bit off at the end." Said Tim.

"Maybe just a little, but she'll be alright.....Let's go through all the objects we removed from the Albrecht's laboratory. That'll cheer us up." Said Laura.

Her Gudara had brought the items to their apartment in Brittany. He'd put them in the same room where Tim kept his state of the art military weapons. There were some of the enchanted weapons Laura had acquired from Horus there too. The entire room gave off an aura of effortless lethality. Now there were more crates and boxes containing artefacts from the Albrecht family lab. Sparkling powders to cure the incurable; a small green blade to bring death to the un-killable. Such things brought more joy to two vampires than a metal hand and a journal full of yellowing parchment.

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Karkengara had known Ronnie was close to death, but he had to remain in the world of four armed priests and pyramids. The human called Veronica Neophytou he gave a seventy thirty chance of survival, with the right hospital care. On the other hand, if the priests survived and went after Ronnie and the two vampires, the result could be catastrophic. They knew Clara at some point in their history, which implied they knew about her planet, her world. The idea of thousands of warriors rampaging through North London.....It couldn't be allowed to happen. The bringer of fire remained in the pyramid long enough to make sure that anyone who might recognise Ronnie, Niña, or Mabina; was dead. He was very thorough and efficient about it; the slaughter had gone on for hours. By the time he was looking at a pyramid turned to rubble, his next thought was about Ronnie. If at all possible, the human woman and friend of Clara's couldn't be allowed to die. Finding her

room in the North London hospital wasn't hard. He pushed his snout into that reality and ran his eyes over her, the eyes of an immensely powerful deity.

"Oh, the infection is spreading." He mumbled.

The doctors had done their best, but a sword going right through Ronnie's bowels; her chances of recovery using human medicine, were always going to be chancy. He now put her chance of a full recovery at thirty seventy. It was bad; Clara would be extremely upset, she might even cry. Her death would leave a hole in the community at the Hornsey house and communities were important to humans. At best, Ronnie might survive, but have life changing damage to her bowels.

"She can't be allowed to die." He mumbled.

Karkengara breathed cold fire over Ronnie. No words in dead languages, no strange gestures with his clawed hands. He was a deity and usually had no need of such things. He simply thought of Ronnie being healed and she was healed. The dreadful spreading infection was cleared out of her body, but he left the wound to heal at its own pace. Her doctors would be a little too curious and amazed if Ronnie was ready to leave the next time they saw her. The bringer of fire now thought Ronnie's chance of a full and lasting recovery, was ninety ten.

"Perfect." He muttered.

His healing had brought her out of unconsciousness. Ronnie looked at him and ran her hand over the end of his snout.

"Am I in hospital?" Asked Ronnie.

"Yes you are, you're safe now." Said Karkengara.

Being awake turned out to be a fleeting thing, Ronnie fell asleep again. When she woke, she'd probably assume seeing him was nothing but a dream.

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Clara knew nothing about the bringer of fire healing Ronnie. Raine was the driving force behind her digging out the rune stone to visit Karkengara's temple in the Underworld. Raine had become fixated on the idea once Clara had spoken of it; obsessed was probably the accurate description. Clara had a little spare time and didn't intend to be there long anyway. It would give her a chance to show her son all the rows of dragon statues. Of course, Karkengara denied any of them were statues of dragons, but statues of him. There were times when he could be quite narcissistic.

"Here.....I knew it was in this drawer." Said Clara. "Justin can come this time.....He's old enough to see the temple and the statues inside."

"Is it safe there for a child?" Asked Raine.

"The Underworld conjures up images of dreadful creatures." Said Clara. "Some places are like that, I've seen some of them. Karkengara's temple is a peaceful place. Justin will be quite safe. Are you ready to go?"

"Yes, ready and eager." Said Raine.

"I'll hold the rune stone and Justin; you hold onto me." Said Clara.

"I'd so love to take a few pictures." Said Raine.

"No, your phone stays here." Said Clara. "Laura once asked about taking picture. Karkengara said his temple was not a place to be photographed. Hold onto me Raine.....We've leaving."

Raine held her arm, while Clara sort of hooked her arm through the handles of Justin's carry cot. That way she could hold the rune stone in her right hand. It looked fiddly, but it would work.

"Ungon Desion Neldo.....Sedit." Said Clara.

No shaking of the ground, no screeching as reality was torn apart. One moment they were in her son's nursery, the next they were in front of huge statue of a dragon. The entire temple was always well lit, by the light from fiery pits, which never went out.

"Oh, that is amazing.....Is Karkengara here ?" Asked Raine.

"No, if he was I would know it." Said Clara.

There was an empty plinth, where the bringer of fire rested while he was there; as if he was just another statue. Clara thought any statue would do, but Karkengara said the one in front of her was his personal favourite. That was odd, as it didn't really look anything like him. Clara placed Justin's tiny hand against the face of the statue and her son giggled.

"This is my son Justin Ned Atherton, who is your friend." Said Clara. "I ask the mighty Karkengara, bringer of fire; to grant my child a little of your strength."

Justin made a gurgling noise. Raine was looking at the huge statue as though it might bite.

"What am I allowed to ask for ?" Asked Raine.

"Everything or nothing, or anything in between." Said Clara. "There are no rules.....What you pray for is up to you. Would you like privacy while you pray ?"

"That would be nice."

Clara took her son far enough away to give Raine privacy, though she could still have heard her pray if she'd been so minded. Clara played with her son and ignored Raine, who was on her knees and speaking to the statue.

"I hope she gets at least some of what she's praying for." Clara muttered to her son.

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