

Clara Copley

(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 16 – The Alchemist

‘He was smiling at her, as he brought a gun out from under his jacket. He’d shown her the gun before; telling her the streets of Addis Ababa could be very dangerous. It was a large heavy gun, the sort usually seen being used by army officers in war films.’

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Laura had been quite surprised when Nathalie had told them to remain at the Hyatt hotel in central Munich. They’d registered under their own names and used their own passports. It wouldn’t take the cleverest assassins in the world to trace them. Those who owned The School of Esoteric Wisdom might not be too bothered by a few dead guards, but they’d definitely hold a grudge about the death of Monseigneur Gérard Mariette. The phone debrief from Nathalie had been quite short.

“I take it your Gudara could carry all three of you to safety ?” Nathalie had asked.

“Yes, he could do that very easily.” Laura had replied. “It would mean Adelaide sleeping in our suite, but there is a spare bed.”

“Do that then, Laura.....Look after Adelaide, keep her safe. She’s a very dear friend of mine.”

Adelaide had been introduced to Laura’s Gudara and she hadn’t seemed at all nervous about him. That disappointed Laura, who was used to people being terrified of him. He had arrived fully clothed, which must have helped.

“I get it Laura, I’m not stupid.” Adelaide had muttered. “If we’re attacked, your Gudara will take us away to somewhere safe. I won’t resist.....As I said, I’m not an idiot.”

Adelaide getting a bit snippy with her, it had to happen. Laura wasn’t fancying having her in their suite all night, but she had agreed to look after her. A dear friend of Nathalie’s it seemed, though Laura couldn’t remember her being that concerned about anyone else. Tim had brought Adelaide’s things to their suite, though the hotel still thought she was using her room. Meals were from room service and eaten in their suite. The cable TV was quite good, which was a nice plus, as it was their only entertainment. There were even a few fairly recent horror films.

“I can see three men in the street.” Said Adelaide. “They’ve been there most of the evening, on and off.”

It was dark outside and Adelaide had been looking out of the window, while they’d been enjoying a decent vampire movie. Yes, even real vampires loved a good vampire film. Adelaide had a look on her face, as if daring Laura to dismiss her concerns. Laura had noticed a lot of people in the street, but none of them had set off her vampire sixth sense, or maybe seventh sense. None of them seemed to be bad guys, though there was no guarantee about that.

“I can see them.....If they enter the hotel, I will know.” Said Laura.

“She will and so will I.” Said Tim. “My new vampire skills are still arriving, but I’ll know if they come into the hotel lobby.”

“I’m not useless in a fight, as you’ve already seen.” Said Adelaide. “I’m still grateful to you both, for being here to defend me.”

“Munich tough guys versus two vampires.” Said Tim. “They’ll be lucky to survive for five minutes.”

Laura would have said anything to Adelaide, to give her the illusion of being in control. In Jerusalem she was the boss, so she needed to still feel like the boss. Laura would like, up to a point, to keep Adelaide happy and feeling protected. In truth there were a lot of people outside the hotel and some were looking at the hotel windows. It was after all, a very beautiful old building. Were any of the people on the pavement planning to attack them ? Laura would have definitely said no. Yet there was Adelaide, staring out of the window again and sighing.

“Come on Adelaide, there must be a movie on cable you like.” Said Laura. “How about the original Carrie movie from nineteen seventy six ? That’s really good.”

“Alright, I suppose I am fretting over nothing.” Said Adelaide. “Carrie it is.....And we can order some room service nibble to go with it.”

“And a bottle or two of house red.....To go with the nibbles.” Said Tim.

Once the film had started, they were full of nibbles and mildly tipsy on the Hyatt’s own brand of red wine. Adelaide seemed relaxed and content, but Laura was constantly using her skills to watch the street outside. The people who owned The School of Esoteric Wisdom, would know where they were by now. It made sense for them to attack; it made no sense for them not to. Laura would have attacked if she’d been in their position.

‘I can see your dirty pillows. Everyone will.’ Carrie’s mum was shouting in the movie.

“Wow, this is a great movie.” Said Adelaide.

Laura wasn’t concentrating on the film; she was quietly getting herself ready for when they were attacked.

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It felt weird, to leave her child in the care of a deity who resembled a dragon. Not even all of a dragon, usually only his head fitted into the Hornsey house. Niña had recruited Ronnie to help her explore the locked off rooms. Not that Ronnie had needed much persuasion. Mabina called round every day and made a point of talking to the builders for a while. In theory, Mabina was looking after Baby Justin, but in reality; it was a dragon bringing up her son. Not that Justin seemed to mind, he always smiled when Karkengara was in his nursery. Once he could talk, Clara realised there’d need to be a conversation about what he told the neighbourhood kids. Clara was slightly jealous; as a child she’d have loved to have a friend like Karkengara.

“Everything alright ?” Asked Noah. “You seem in a day dream this morning.”

They were in the office of the Luna Blue and it was Clara’s day to look at the numbers and decide if anyone was ‘at it,’ as Cyril liked to refer to embezzlement. Mild skimming, or old fashioned theft was dealt with by the culprit being sacked. Serious crookery might well mean the culprit ending up in a flooded basement of an old paint factory. Needless to say, serious embezzlement was quite rare. Clara’s desk was in her own fairly private part of the office. As long as they spoke quietly, no one would overhear her conversation with Noah. Her lover and manager of the Luna Blue was sat on the edge of her desk. Noah still sat down carefully after being badly wounded in the attack on the rival cartel in Colindale. After a while, sitting and standing carefully might become a habit, even if the wound no longer caused him any pain.

“Niña is now exploring mysterious rooms and chambers in the house.” Said Clara. “My son has a dragon as a nanny and.....I really don’t mind, not really. I just remember days when I’d have been there with Niña, searching for the next strange chamber.”

“Ahh, the peril of becoming an adult.” Said Noah. “You’re now responsible for the care of your child.....That will change things, probably forever.”

"I'm the bread winner now." Said Clara. "That's great.....But sometimes I'd like to only have myself to worry about. Daniel thinks Justin will begin to talk fairly soon. We'll need to get everyone together one night. I'll treat them to Thai food and a few bottles of wine. I might even print out a few old World War II posters. Careless talk cost lives.....As the saying goes."

"Talking, already ? The time has gone by so fast." Said Noah.

"Then walking and.....I have no idea about schooling." Said Clara. "I don't like the idea of home schooling, he needs to mix with other kids; ordinary human kids. I can afford it, so I might send him to a private school. I get the idea that if I sent him to a local comprehensive, he'd be running the place within a year."

Clara grinned at Noah, who grinned back, but it wasn't totally a joke. Clara couldn't leave it until the last minute to make a decision on a school for Justin Ned Atherton; all the best private schools had waiting lists. Not that she'd totally ruled out the local comp.

"Get him a home tutor." Said Noah. "It may have come out in two thousand and eight, but I remember all the problems the kids had in Twilight."

"Idiot." Muttered Clara.

They kissed and Clara was glad Noah was in her life and taking an interest in Justin. From what she'd observed, bringing up an ordinary human kid wasn't easy. Bringing up a vampire child was going to be even tougher. It was nice that Noah knew all about her and her son. It was important....One day Justin might start calling Noah, Dad.

"A serious suggestion; Justin will need to mix with other kids." Said Noah. "All kids, not just the ones with parents who can afford huge school fees. Send him to the local comp. You can always arrange for extra tuition at the weekends."

"A mixture of public and private.....Hybrid education." Said Clara. "I like the sound of that. He'll also have lots exposure to other vampires, which is rare. We're not famous for mixing well with others of our kind. I'll have to make my mind up though, and do it soon."

Ideally she'd have asked Simon for his opinion, but that was now impossible. By refusing his offer to live with him in the Florence of the Medici, she'd cut off any further contact with the father of her child.

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Genevieve Debré had a French EU passport, but always thought of herself as Belgian. Her mother was a proud Belgian woman, but her father was a French born patriot, to the point where it annoyed people. Known as Gen to just about everyone, she'd tried to tune out the worst of her father's extreme rhetoric, but in the end.....It had driven her away. Her mother was still there with him though, listening to it day after day, night after night. Gen still went home for Christmas, though it never really felt like home anymore. She always survived the experience with her dad yelling; mainly because of the sedatives she always took with her. One good thing about coming from a French aristocratic family was the inherited wealth. Gen had never known real poverty and was never likely to.

"Wow, this place is amazing." Said Gen. "Needs a really good refurbishment, but it still looks incredible."

"We need to be gone before dark." Said Youcef. "Unpleasant things can happen in Westcott Villa, once the sun has set."

Youcef was one of the three companions Nathalie had promised her. He was Algerian and Gen hadn't been surprised to find an Algerian living and working in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Algerians were one of those races, who turned up everywhere. As for her other two promised companions ?

Nathalie had arranged it all, without keeping Youcef in the loop. He had no idea who they were, but was certain they'd arrive.

"Nathalie Aurigny is very efficient.....They will arrive." Youcef had told her.

He was her driver and general gopher, though Youcef might not have liked that term. He'd met her at the airport and made sure she was comfortable at her hotel. He'd then picked her up after breakfast to bring her to the huge mansion Samuel Westcott had built for himself on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. Youcef was growing on Gen, despite him checking out her arse far too often.

"Unpleasant things indeed; nonsense.....I have no intention of running away once the sun sets." Said Gen. "You can go if you want to, but come back for me early in the morning."

Westcott Villa still had lighting and there were good heavy doors where you needed good heavy doors, to feel safe. If Youcef was superstitious and gullible, that was a huge plus. While he headed back to the city, she could give Westcott's home the once over in private. According to Nathalie, there were alchemical instructions somewhere on the property; instructions to make unlimited amounts of pure gold. Youcef was stood quite still and looking awkward. He definitely wasn't heading for the front door and his car.

"Nathalie said I have to make sure nothing bad happens to you." Said Youcef. "If you stay here tonight, I must stay too. We may both die because you're being stubborn."

"Then stay, but don't expect me to feel bad about it." Said Gen. "I'm not saying I don't believe there are forces we don't understand, but I've never done Samuel Westcott any harm, or hurt any of his family. If there are shades in this building, they'll have no grudge to settle with me."

"You really believe that ?" Asked Youcef.

"Yes, I do."

He was smiling at her, as he brought a gun out from under his jacket. He'd shown her the gun before; telling her the streets of Addis Ababa could be very dangerous. It was a large heavy gun, the sort usually seen being used by army officers in war films.

"Good.....You can talk to any shades bothering us tonight." Said Youcef. "My gun and I will deal with any humans trying to cause us trouble."

No use in pretending to go to sleep, or dig through the villa for anything she could make into a passable meal. Gen wanted to give the place a good look over and Youcef could help her.

"Come on Youcef, we're going to explore." Said Gen. "We'll move along the main hallway, looking in all the rooms."

"What are we looking for ?" Asked Youcef.

"We'll know it when we see it." Said Gen.

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Veronica Neophytou, Ronnie to everyone; still hadn't fully recovered from Hacker Jim being killed. It was unlikely she'd ever fully come to terms with his death, but she could live with that. She'd had quite a few boyfriends and nearly married one of them. Jim was different to most of the previous men in her life. He was prone to panic attacks and being honest, Jim was a bit of a nerd. She'd seen something in him though and she really had, genuinely loved Jim Weaver; the one time almost total recluse from Cleckheaton.

"I spoke to Karkengara." Said Ronnie. "He thinks the deeper we explore these chambers, the greater the risk."

"He told me that too." Said Niña. "I think that's partly why Clara said I shouldn't explore on my own."

"Some places have a feel to them, a threatening feel." Said Ronnie. "No panic, but we need to be very careful."

Niña nodded at her, as they sat in what Niña had named the Oval Room. They'd come straight into the Dragon Courtyard using the dragon statues and the circles on the floor. After that they'd come through the garden and past the long row of The Saints. They were now sat on a low wall around a fountain in the Oval Room.

Niña had called it the Oval Room, because the fountain was oval shaped. Not that the fountain had water in it. It was dry, dusty and probably hadn't contained water for a very long time. The trigger for worries about growing risks ? Ronnie had brushed against a marble statue and it had toppled over. If she hadn't been quick on her feet, it might well have crushed her. A massive and heavy statue, toppled by her barely bumping into it. There was no proof that it had been aimed by someone or something, but the incident didn't feel accidental. Ronnie considered she was just there for support. Where they went and what they did there, was for Niña to decide.

"I think I saw the guardian creature as we left The Saints." Said Niña. "To me.....It feels as though we're getting a lot more interest in us, as we progress through the rooms."

"You're probably right." Said Ronnie. "What did the guardian look like ?"

"Grey, very grey.....Like a statue that can walk." Said Niña. "I saw its eyes move and realised it had been watching us. Then it.....This is the weird bit, Ronnie. It walked through a wall and was gone."

"I'll definitely keep an eye out for it." Said Ronnie. "But, it's your coin in the slot as they say, Niña. Where are we heading today ?"

Niña was a vampire, with the same eccentricities as Laura and Clara. According to Niña, certain doorways had a vibe, an invitation to enter, or a warning to keep out. For all Ronnie knew, Niña might be taking them through 'keep out' doorways. As Ronnie had no vampire skills, she was happy to follow the girl.

"The white marble door." Said Niña, while pointing. "I get a warm feeling from it."

"Fair enough, white marble door it is." Said Ronnie.

Niña was keeping notes on a very scruffy map she was keeping up to date. They had a lot to carry, just in case they were stuck somewhere for a few days. Karkengara had promised to come looking for them, if they were gone for three days. Ronnie thought they looked like a Boy Scout troop out for a hike, but the full packs were better than running out of food and water. Niña touched the handle of the white marble door.

"It tingles." Said Niña.

"Is that a good thing ?" Asked Ronnie.

"Good.....I think."

The handle twisted and made a clicking sound, as Niña pulled at it. It seemed to be a nice simple, unlocked door; until there was an explosion. The door came apart and Ronnie was wondering if there really was an afterlife. If there was, would she see Jim there ?

"Damn, I put my flashlight at the bottom of my pack." Said Niña.

They weren't in the Oval Room anymore and where they were was dark. Really dark, Ronnie couldn't see a thing. She had a tiny light on a dongle attached to her house keys. Not much light, but it showed several walls and a wooden door not too far away.

"Are you alright, Niña ?" Asked Ronnie. "My face is feeling a bit scorched."

"Mine too, I'm dreading looking at it." Said Niña. "Something saved us I think, though I think we both got singed a little."

The girl had a large flashlight in her pack, a heavy duty six battery job. As she turned it on, Ronnie couldn't help giving a small yelp. All her exposed skin was scorched and the sleeve of her jacket was still smouldering.

"Crap.....I've been cooked a bit." Said Ronnie.

Poor Niña was looking at a burn on her arm, just above her wrist. Nothing likely to do her any lasting damage, but it looked livid and painful.

"Oh, I hate burns.....They hurt for ages." Said Niña.

"Mabina will be able to heal our scorched skin." Said Ronnie. "At least we're alive.....I think you're right, something moved us here and saved our lives."

"Might have been the guardian." Said Niña.

"Yep, you might be right." Said Ronnie. "Let's open the door in front of us and see where we are."

It was the only door, in what looked like a fairly small room with no windows. The door opened and they were back in the Oval Room again, but from another direction and a door they'd never used before. As for the white marble door ? There was nothing left of it and where it had been, was now a ruin. Several pictures on the wall were burning quite fiercely. Not that Ronnie had any intention of being a temporary firefighter. That side of the room was already wrecked and the burning pictures posed no risk to them.

"Well.....Something saved us, or we'd now be dead." Said Niña.

"We could go back and tidy up." Said Ronnie. "Or we can carry on.....The choice is yours, Niña ?"

"Some healing ointment would be nice, but I'd like to carry on." Said Niña. "You choose the door this time, Ronnie. You might be luckier with your choice than I was."

Ronnie wasn't sure if luck was part of it. Karkengara had warned about the growing risk from exploring the locked off rooms. Then a marble door explodes, in a way almost guaranteed to kill them. To Ronnie, it seemed caution and fighting skills were needed more than luck. She stood close to three wooden doors, as if sniffing at them. One with a cat image painted on it, felt right.

"Well.....I can't explain it, but this door feels.....It feels alright." Said Ronnie.

"Maybe you just like cats." Said Niña.

"I can take them or leave them." Said Ronnie. "Shall I try to open the door ?"

"Might as well, or we'll be stood here all day."

Ronnie had been close to death a few times and didn't think it was something you could simply outstare. Quick and relatively pain free was the best to hope for and it was better than some long and lingering disease with a Latin name. Ronnie moved fast, turning the handle and then shoving the door open. It was there just beyond the door. The very grey and statue looking guardian. Of course, it might not have been the guardian, that was just the way Niña viewed it.

"Fuck !" Said Niña.

"It hasn't hurt us yet." Said Ronnie.

It looked at Ronnie, as if trying to work out if she was a threat. It was just so universally grey, that it was disconcerting. Grey clothes, grey hair, grey skin.....She wondered if its eyes might be grey too, but she couldn't see them that clearly. As for its sex ? Apart from the long hair, there was no clue to its gender.

"We mean you no harm." Said Niña.

"Yes.....No harm.....No harm at all." Said Ronnie.

When it spoke, the voice sounded a little male, though Ronnie still wouldn't have bet on it being a male.

"I mean you no harm.....Come with me." Said the guardian.

There was a slight musty smell coming from their new friend, but it wasn't unpleasant. The guardian took them through doorway after doorway, passage after passage. There had probably been no

intention to get them lost, but they were. Without the help of him, or her, they might be hopelessly lost and left hoping that Karkengara found them.

"My name is Niña.....May I know your name?"

"I know your names; I've been watching you for a while. I am a very rare thing, a male minion of the Ancient Gods. I used to be the king of somewhere, but I remember little about those times. Now I am known as Tempest and I'm happy to use that name."

A male minion, Ronnie had always assumed there were none. Tempest seemed friendly, but the real test would come when they asked to be taken back to the Dragon Courtyard.

"Where are you taking us?" Asked Ronnie.

"My home, it isn't that far." Said Tempest. "There's food there and fresh water. I also have a few magical unguents that will heal your wounds. Fire here can be tricky.....You were lucky I shifted you when I did."

"Thank you for helping us." Said Niña.

"You shouldn't be here, not really." Said Tempest. "These chambers were locked away for a reason. Far too dangerous to explore. But what is done is done, you're here now. I'll help you as best I can. Once you're healed a little, I'll take you back to the Dragon Courtyard."

"Thank you, Tempest." Said Ronnie. "Your help is much appreciated."

He made a noise in his throat, as he nodded his head. That was obviously his way of acknowledging a friendly word, or compliment.

"We're there.....My home." Said Tempest.

It was a nice trick, the way Tempest could touch a wall and part of it would open. Like a narrow doorway, a section of the wall opened away from them. After making his clicking sound and nodding at them, Tempest took them into his home. Ronnie had expected something grubby and awful, to go with his tatty grey clothes. Instead they were in a large, clean and pleasant smelling main room, with several doors leading off from it. There were even a few plants in the room, in front of a wide set of windows. Beyond the windows was a meadow and beyond the meadow was a wood.

"Home sweet home.....I chose it because of the light." Said Tempest. "Make yourselves comfortable, I'll find those healing unguents."

Tempest went away, while muttering about where the unguents might be. There was a sofa, quite a comfortable sofa. Nothing about Tempest matched Ronnie's assumptions about him, especially the comfy looking furniture. She shrugged at Niña.

"I get the feeling Tempest could become a good friend." Said Ronnie.

"He already is, Ronnie.....He saved us from the exploding door." Said Niña.

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Akiva Yatsko had always prided himself on being able to find anywhere on the globe, and quite importantly, get there. Getting out again had sometimes been a problem, but he'd never been totally lost or unable to enter where he needed to be. He also knew the perils of different parts of the world, far better than most journalists. They just needed quirky stories to sell papers, but Akiva had actually been to some of the most dangerous places on the planet. Nathalie hadn't really needed to tell him about the dangers in Addis Ababa and Ethiopia in general. She had told him though, in detail and during a long phone call. She'd offered him a very good payday though, so he was happy to listen.

"Do you need us to book your airline ticket?" Nathalie had asked. "We have connection of course; it can be in any name you're currently using."

"No, I always book my own travel." He'd said.

It was safer that way, even organisations like the Siler Dawn could have leaks. He flew out to Ethiopia using documents under the name of Vigen Chitechyan. A name he'd once chosen at random and had used a few times. He just liked the sound of the name. As the documents for Vigen hadn't expired, he'd decided to be Mr Chitechyan one last time. After that, the various plastic cards and documents would be burned, or shredded. He'd travelled first class of course, Nathalie had promised him one hell of a payday.

"Are you comfortable, Sir ?" Asked the female flight attendant.

"Yes.....Very, thank you." Said Akiva.

He loved the perks with travelling first class. Silly things really, like the personal towel and the washing kit. It all indicated that he had the where with all to afford the fare. His plane hit the tarmac at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport, just as Genevieve Debré was arriving at the Westcott Villa.

"Call her Gen, she likes that." Nathalie had told him.

He'd have called her your Excellency if Nathalie had asked. He was being paid a large fee and he'd turn a blind eye to any personal foibles for that kind of cash. He'd been given a quick briefing on Gen and being honest, he wasn't impressed.

"Do you have any specific vehicle in mind ?"

Had asked the guy at the car rental desk at Bole airport. Kaya it had been, they'd have even rented him a car with a driver for a surprisingly small amount of Ethiopian Birr, the local currency. Of course they'd been happy to be paid in US dollars, everyone was.

"Something powerful and solid. I'll be using a lot of back roads on this trip."

Which implied Akiva was a sales rep, or maybe some kind of official with an NGO. He was currently driving a powerful and very sturdy Toyota Land Cruiser along the main road out to where Samuel Westcott had built his rambling villa. The road was pretty good, but he'd been warned that it eventually became a dirt track. It was dusk, the kind of Ethiopian dusk that quickly became full darkness.

"I just hope she doesn't go back to her hotel as soon as the sun sets." Akiva muttered.

No streetlights of course, just the occasional set of halogens on another SUV. Akiva was used to driving at night in some fairly inhospitable part of the world. He'd once had someone fire at him, on the roads in Southern Lebanon. Not that he'd panicked. Akiva enjoyed life, but he'd outstared death in his early twenties. If it came for him that night, he was willing to meet it face on. He was armed of course; he actually had three decent handguns. Nathalie and her contacts again.....One of them had given him a case as he'd left the airport. In the case were three top quality handguns and quite a bit of ammunition.

"Gen sounds alright, but I'm not sure of Youcef." Akiva muttered. "As for Sophia the American woman.....Nathalie must be crazy. You can never trust anyone who's ex-CIA.....Ever."

By the time Akiva reached the perimeter fence for the Westcott Villa, it was late and very dark. No moon and enough cloud to stop any starlight. The fence was in bad shape, it'd be easy to find a hole to crawl through. There was a sign saying keep out near where the dirt track road, became nothing but dry sand and stones.

'Keep out. Perimeter patrolled by armed guards.'

The fence told anyone who cared to read it and it told them in four languages. Akiva drove on and found the villa, which had lights on in several windows.

"Good.....She's likely to still be there." Akiva muttered.

He parked next to the car which Gen must have arrived in, probably being driven by Youcef. Akiva pressed pause a little, to give whoever was in the villa, some time to see him. He slammed the door

on his Land Cruiser a few times and turned the high beams on and off half a dozen times. By the time he reached the door to the villa, someone was opening it.

"What do you want ?" Asked a loud male voice, probably Youcef.

"I'm here to protect Gen, she's expecting me." Shouted Akiva.

"What's your name ?" Asked Youcef.

"I'd rather talk directly to Gen Debré."

"Fair enough, you'd better come inside." Shouted Youcef.

It sounded as though it was just Gen and Youcef in the villa. Nathalie had told him that Sophia might not be there until the following morning. How much had Gen been told ? Knowing Nathalie she'd probably been told the bare minimum, until all three of them were there. Akiva followed Youcef into the villa, where there was the definite smell of food. A small woman walked up to him. She looked quite young and the hand she shook his with, was sticky from some kind of sauce.

"I'm Gen Debré.....I was told there'd be two others, but given no names. You're just in time for my vegetable tajine. I'm told my tajine's are delicious."

So, Nathalie hadn't given her any names. It wasn't just paranoia and internal politics, Nathalie could be a terrible organiser. If ever there was rerun of D day, it was unlikely anyone would want Nathalie to organise it. That said, the Silver Dawn had thrived under her watch.

"I'm Akiva Yatsko.....I'm here to help you, Gen." Said Akiva. "There's an American woman too, an ex-CIA operative. Sophia is all the name I was given for her. Sophia should be here early in the morning."

"Akiva Yatsko, I've heard of you." Said Youcef. "I heard you were dead."

"Now, now.....Play nice, Youcef." Said Gen. "Come into the kitchen the pair of you.....I spent a lot of time on the tajine and I want to see it eaten before it goes cold."

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Using her gun was to be avoided in the hotel, avoided at just about all costs. After all, the two vampires rarely resorted to using firearms. If one of them looked certain to be killed, then shooting their enemies was just about acceptable. Adelaide Ducombe might look like everyone's favourite middle aged aunt, but she was no stranger to violence. She had knives black ops soldiers would have been proud of, and she knew how to use them. Not that she was thinking about using her blades that night. Laura seemed to be sleeping peacefully, which was a very good sign. Adelaide must have been drifting between sleep and dreams. She never saw Laura move across the room, but there she was, her face close to hers.

"I felt them enter the hotel." Said Laura. "I'd fight them, but our real names are known here. We'll go up and out over the roofs and come back later for our things."

"You're going to let them win, Laura ?" Asked Adelaide.

"We could leave a trail of dead bodies, but I don't think that's a good idea." Said Laura. "We'll still have the Hand, so they'll come at us again. Next time we'll be using fake documents. Then we can teach them a lesson in good manners."

Tim appeared, moving as quickly and quietly as Laura. Adelaide had never been jealous of vampire skills before, but she was beginning to feel like the weakling of the group. She wasn't even being allowed to use her gun. As Laura said, revenge for their humiliation would come later.

"I've removed chains and opened doors." Said Tim. "We can get across the roofs and come out through a nearby nightclub who are open all night."

"I just hate running away from anyone." Said Adelaide.

"We all do.....Leave our things for now, we're travelling light." Said Laura.

"Who has the Hand ?" Asked Adelaide

"I do.....Quickly, we'll need to run." Said Tim.

Despite every action movie Adelaide had ever seen, they didn't take the stairs because the elevators were dangerous in such situations. Laura said the elevators were quicker, so they used them. They were quickly on the top floor, with Tim leading and Laura watching the rear. Adelaide felt like a kind of filling in between them, like being the centre of a vampire sandwich; the feeling was strangely comforting. They reached the door giving access to the roof and the chains had been removed from the push bar. There the chains were, broken and lying on the floor.

"I'd like to hear the cops explain the broken chains." Tim muttered.

Through the door and a man was on the ground.

"One of the guards I think, from The School of Esoteric Wisdom." Said Tim. "Killing them will have consequences, but knocking them out.....That's fine."

The man was out cold, but Adelaide could see his chest moving as he breathed. The rules seemed more complicated than she'd thought. She needed the situation clarified.

"Can I use my gun to threaten them ?" Asked Adelaide.

"Great, you can even hit them with it." Said Laura. "Just no pulling the trigger."

They crossed several roofs and went through a few doors with broken chains and locks. Tim had done a good job of preparing the ground. Laura felt two men come out onto the roof of the hotel, but they were a long way behind them.

"The club next." Said Tim. "Just be natural.....Act as though you're just another member."

"In just slippers, a dressing gown and a coat over the top." Muttered Adelaide. "If I can pull this off, I deserve an Oscar."

"You'll be amazed.....People see what they expect to see." Said Laura.

There were several floors to the night club and lots of people wandering about. Most of them seemed to be at least mildly intoxicated and a few seemed drunk as skunks. Maybe people did see what they expected to see ? No one bothered them and they were soon in the street outside.

Adelaide felt a little cold and realised they had nowhere to go.

"Where to now, Laura ?" She asked.

"We find an all-night coffee place and wait for an hour, maybe two." Said Laura. "Don't worry, you won't be frozen or starved. Then we go back to the hotel and go to our suite. With luck, the night time raiders will have left it as it was. But we can buy new clothes if we have to."

"I get the ideas you've done this sort of thing before." Said Adelaide.

"More times than we'd like to admit." Said Tim.

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