

Clara Copley

(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 5 - Cyril

"Did you say they have air defences ?" Asked Tim.

"Oh yes, lots of ground to air missiles on the roof." Said Laura. "Another rumour says they were installed by the same people who set up the missile system for the White House."

»

~ Installing protection for the Hornsey house ~

There had been times in her life, when Clara would have happily lived in a cave; as long as there'd been a hot shower and electric light. She'd never been a fussy person and definitely not a person who was into 'things.' Vampires tended to have a long life and quickly outgrew the desire to own lots of things they didn't need. Part of it was to be able to move quickly of course. Sometimes vampires had to go on the run. Which was difficult, if you owned too much.

"Never own more than you can carry in both hands, while running." Clara muttered.

"What was that ?" Asked Elizabeth Grant.

"A quote from Hemingway I think, though he probably said it better." Said Clara. "I thrived on a fairly Spartan existence. A bed, a shower and a lover or two. I happily lived like that for years, until I met Simon. Justin changed all that.....You can't travel light when you've got a child to look after."

Hence the need to give the Hornsey house better magical protection than just about any other house in the country. It was rumoured a famous billionaire had a few resident shamans, but Clara had never believed that. Elizabeth Grant, who everyone knew as Liz; had once been a very exclusive escort. Meeting Brendan had changed all that and there had been a lucky dark magic transformation. Actually, Clara still wasn't sure if Liz viewed her transformation as good luck, or bad. Liz's right arm had temporarily become a long black tentacle, which she was using to apply powerful wards to the house.

"No one you don't invite into the house, will get past my wards." Said Liz. "It's a clever system; though don't think of it as AI. It will get to know who is in the house and when. It will react to anyone it thinks is a threat to the usual residents of your Hornsey house."

"React sounds worrying." Said Clara. "I hope it doesn't vaporise the milkman."

"No.....Anyone it doesn't like the look of, will be transferred to the oubliette." Said Liz.

"I didn't know we had one."

"I'm using the cellar as the place to send potential threats." Said Liz.

"Perfect, very dismal down there.....And there's still the odour of fresh blood."

The house had to be right, before Clara began hunting for the Psochic order. Vampires held grudges more than anyone else. But before the war began, her house had to be the perfect environment for a baby. The carpets and rugs had been deep cleaned by Patsy. Mabina had actually hired a machine to clean and polish the wooden floors. New furniture had been purchased to replace the pieces damaged beyond repair. Most of the windows had been replaced with expensive frames and hardened glass. Her home looked good, smelled fresh.....But it needed the magical wards to be perfect.

"I know how you're installing clever wards." Said Clara. "It's Karkengara isn't it ? The famous Bringer of Fire."

"Yes, he's here now, though he's keeping himself hidden."

Karkengara, the dragon deity whose world had been destroyed a very long time ago. Quite mercenary at times and always looking for a percentage, he'd never been her friend. All that had changed when the huge dragon had helped them banish Q'uq'umatz out of existence. Liz had always liked the Bringer of Fire and Clara considered her to be a pretty good judge of character. Bringer of Fire ? Yes, dragon deities really could exhale flames hotter than the surface of the sun.

"He's welcome to appear in my home, if he wishes." Said Clara.

"Are you sure, Clara ?" Asked Liz. "If anyone else were to walk in.....He is rather large and quite scary."

"Most who visit this house are fairly shock proof." Said Clara. "The dragon is a friend.....He will always be welcome here."

Liz had been transformed into a Keeper of the gates, in the Underworld. Not exactly a full time role, Liz was still living with Brendan in a flat in London. Her whole body could become a mass of writhing tentacles. She was unstoppable in that form and able to destroy just about any living being. A few words in a language Clara didn't know, a wave of her tentacle arm.....

"Ahhh, Clara.....Good to see you back in your own timeline." Said Karkengara.

Only the dragon's head was in the room, sticking out of the wall next to the fireplace. The rest of Karkengara was still in another world, or dimension. A neat trick, which meant that he could go anywhere with enough room for his massive dragon's head.

"Thank you for helping make my home.....Safe for my son." Said Clara.

The dragon's head made the sound cats made when sicking up fur balls. The metal talisman appeared on the new rug in front of the fireplace.

"Left by the Psochics, their creatures could use it to enter the house." Said Karkengara. "I've searched and it is the only one. I suggest throwing it into a dumpster, a long way from here."

Clara picked up the talisman, and she recognised the pattern etched into the metal. It was the same pattern the occultists had worn on their robes.

"I can throw it in the Thames, on the way home." Said Liz.

"Thank you, Liz.....Chuck it in somewhere nice and deep." Said Clara.

Laura had already called her boss, Nathalie Aurigny who effectively ran the Silver Dawn. There had been the offer of help when it was needed; the Psochics were a common enemy. As to where they had their base ? The general consensus was somewhere in the middle east, probably still somewhere in Jerusalem's old town.

~

~

~ Laura and her muse, her Gudara ~

Strangely enough, it had been Nathalie Aurigny's idea. That of course was why she was the boss with the huge office, expensive clothes and boss level salary package. A quick phone call about the likely location of the Psochics, had brought her under Nathalie's gaze. Laura was still paid well by the Silver Dawn and the apartment in Brittany was still hers. Yet, as Nathalie had noticed.....

"We rarely see you these days, Laura." Nathalie had said. "I'm quite prepared to send you help with the Psochic problem, but I do expect you to work for me occasionally."

"Can I have Akiva ?" Laura had asked.

"Akiva Yatsko.....One of the best assets we ever had." Nathalie had told her. "Pity, but he vanished into one of the nastier parts of the Middle East. I did look for him, but the agent I use in the area, said he was likely to have died in Syria. A dangerous place for a man with a hero fixation."

"Oh, that is bad news.....I got to know him well."

"Akiva was well paid and understood the risks." Nathalie had said. "I know it sounds cold, but I have other assets I can loan you. Well trained operatives with a little more stability than poor Akiva. Anyway.....You avoided my question, Laura. I have need of your talents and I am actually paying you a monthly retainer. When are you going to walk into my office, looking keen and ready to work?" A valid question and Laura did owe Nathalie some honesty about it. Air travel was fine, but it was a difficult connection in France. Eurotunnel was also fine, but the drive to Brittany became a little boring after the first few times. Mainly though it was Tim. There was no way Laura was going to leave him in London, so there'd always be the two of them doing the commute from North London to northern France. Not that Laura wanted to resign and lose her contacts in the Silver Dawn. The pay was good too and well worth holding onto. The real problem? Laura wanted her cake, but wanted to eat it too.

"I lost the ability to use the Egg of Astaroth when I destroyed a God." Laura had said. "I knew there'd be consequences of course, but Horus took away just about everything. I can no longer travel through the Abyss to get to almost anywhere in many worlds. Being honest.....It feels as though I've lost a limb, maybe two. I will look into fast and reliable ways of getting to Brittany."

"Just one moment, Laura."

Nathalie was muttering at someone, probably an archivist. Nathalie always had an archivist near her, sometimes two of them. Strange creatures, usually incredibly old and male. They had a telepathic link to the archives of the Silver Dawn. The archives probably held more data on Laura than she knew about herself.

"I am assured your Gudara will still answer your summons." Nathalie had said. "Try him out, but there is no reason why he can't bring you to me. I'm told you won't need yellow flowers from the first forest.....Dreadfully whimsical stuff, Laura. Call your Gudara; he's probably been missing you."

"I assumed I'd lost the ability to call him."

"Oh, Laura.....Never assume." Nathalie had said. "According to our records, he's independent of the Ancient Gods. Summon him and use him to bring you here. Bring Tim too; it'll be nice to see you both. I need to see you soon, Laura. Otherwise I may need to remove you from our payroll."

A conversation which had led to Laura being in her Hornsey bedroom. Sitting on the cream coloured rug next to her bed. Like everything in the house, the rug had been cleaned. It was now a pleasure to be in her once grubby room. Not that the improvement would last. There were simply too many fun things in life, to waste all that time on regular cleaning. No Tim with her, though he had met her strange muse, her Gudara. Tim would join her in being zapped through the ether by her Gudara, but only when she was sure it was safe.

"Gudara, answer me.....I summon you to appear." Laura said.

Once there had been the use of mystical blooms from the first forest. He knew her now though and he'd taken her to some very dangerous places. Her Gudara had nearly been killed once, though he didn't appear to be bothered by the danger. It was her Gudara who'd killed the female police officer.....But that had been a while ago.

"My Gudara.....Come to me." Muttered Laura.

When he appeared, he always did it slowly, as if trying not to startle her. A huge human like creature and naked, though he never looked totally human. He was sat crossed legged in front of her, his

buttocks on the floor beyond her rug. Once his naked maleness had been shocking to her, but not anymore. He'd killed for her and nearly died for her, which made him family. Laura reached out and placed her right hand on his shoulder. Her Gudara used his fingers to stroke her face.

"It has been a long time.....Too long." Said Laura.

"I did wonder if you had died."

He had a deep voice and he'd learned to speak English by simply being around her and Tim. Very clever was her Gudara. He was one of the original vampires, who'd fed on the creatures who'd existed before mankind had arrived. Most of his kind were long dead, but the first forest had saved him in some way, which was beyond her understanding. He'd been saved to be her muse and sometimes, her protector.

"I nearly died, but I'm still among the living." Said Laura.

"That pleases me, Laura."

Again he stroked her cheek. There was real warmth there, yet she'd seen him fight. In the right conditions and for the right motivation, her Gudara could be a brutal and merciless warrior. Where did he go when she didn't require anything of him ? That was still a mystery.

"I need you to move me around this world, maybe other worlds too." Said Laura.

He nodded at her and made a grumbling noise at the back of his throat. That was his happy sound....The louder it became, the happier he was.

"Tim will often be with me.....You know Tim." Said Laura. "It will be dangerous and I will ask you to fight by my side. You're my friend, not my servant. Are you happy to fight with me ?"

Laura had mentioned summoning him to Clara. With such a huge creature, there was always the chance of loud noises. Once, he'd nearly knocked over her wardrobe. His happy sound was loud enough to be heard throughout the house.

"I will help you and fight with you." Said her Gudara.

Laura was a Gudara, as were Clara and Simon. It was the original word for vampires, when all worlds were young and true wisdom lived in the first forest. Laura began to picture the place in her mind, the secret den where she'd stored most of her valuables. Every vampire needed such a den, according to Simon. It was in a hidden part of a cellar, in an old manor house not that far away. Some of Clara's valuable had been placed there, when there was a threat of attack. Everything had been taken by car, before being carried at least a mile, usually on dark nights. The trip with her Gudara would hopefully be almost instant.

"You've been there before." Said Laura. "Do you remember my den ?"

"Yes, I can take you there."

He stood up and Laura stood up against him, with her hands gripping his forearms. Her Gudara was muscular and tall, he seemed to tower above her. There was a slight odour too, a maleness that was hard to define. He muttered something, probably a standard ritual to move them both through the grey between worlds. It was always going to be fiddly, compared to using the Egg of Astaroth, the metal disc which nestled under skin and up against her ribs. No matter what, it was far better than Eurotunnel on a busy weekend.

"Hold on.....Very tightly." Said her Gudara.

Laura had travelled with her Gudara many times. The world seemed to drop away and they dropped with it. For a few seconds they seemed to be flying, soaring over the first forest. The world appeared to reform around them and within a few seconds; Laura was stood in her secret Den.

"That was just like old times." Said Laura. "Now I can seal the door from the inside."

The door was a heavy stone slab, which she'd always had to leave openable from the old dank cellar of the manor house. Now she could get there without using the door, she pushed across four strong latches. It would now take dynamite to get at her precious things, or the help of a Gudara.

"Could you come here on your own?" Asked Laura. "I may need you to fetch things I need.....Could you do that?"

He went quiet and Laura had been expecting that. He needed to think it through, before committing himself to an answer.

"Yes.....I could do that. You'd need to describe what I need to fetch."

Never the most talkative of people, that statement was long for her Gudara. It was going to work; she once again had the ability to instantly travel to just about anywhere. The trick had always been picturing the desired destination in her mind.

"Tim next, we need to bring Tim here." Said Laura. "Once he's comfortable with being hurtled through the grey, we can go to Brittany."

Her Gudara was stood there, naked and making his happy sounds. She'd dressed him before, even had clothes made for someone his size. That had surprised a tailor on the Edgeware Road.

Sometimes though, a journey to a location on another world, would leave him naked. He needed clothing soon though, if he was going to take them to the Brittany headquarters of the Silver Dawn.

"We're going to need to find something to fit you." Said Laura. "I think.....Your naked days are over."

~

~

~ A meeting with Cyril H Carter ~

Most of his employees thought the middle H in Cyril's name, was something rather grand. Horatio maybe, or even Hugo. Clara had heard someone suggest Hamish. The truth was much more mundane and Cyril had told Simon after one too many glasses of merlot. Cyril thought the H looked better on his business cards and company letterheads. There was no middle name.

"You're doing well for yourself, Cyril." Clara muttered.

Noah had dropped her off past the security gate and the guys in smart uniforms. Cyril's company was still called 'Cyril's Petit Champignon', and its core business was still producing fake meat. Times had been good and times had been bad in the fake food sector. Without the ill-gotten gains from his criminal empire, Cyril's ersatz burger business might have gone under. The business now thrived, with even the posh Sunday magazines extolling the virtues of artificial meat.

"Even the TV news was on about it." Noah had mentioned. "They reckon fake meat will be part of the average family diet, in just a few years."

Made mostly from fungus, though that was hidden by a long Latin name on the list of ingredients.

Soon though, eating processed fungus would be the new norm.....If you believed the posh Sunday papers. Cyril's first reaction to having a success on his hands? He'd moved from the old premises on the North Circular, to something far grander in Wembley. Clara has been given the entry code for the front doors the day Champignon Towers had been opened. Once inside she approached the reception desk. Good, she recognised the woman on the desk.

"Hi Maggie.....I am expected." Said Clara.

"I have you on my list, Clara. Noah told us when you had Justin. When are you bringing him in to see us all?"

"Soon, Maggie.....Very soon." Said Clara. "And you have to hold him, it's obligatory."

Like the whole building, the floor carpet looked new and shiny, as did the refurbished lifts. Clara would never have told Cyril, but she'd preferred the rather lived in look, of the previous head office.

It had looked a little seedy, which was perfect for Cyril's criminal empire. There were two lifts now.....

"Two lifts.....A real treat on a busy day." Cyril had told her.

Clara entered the first lift and pressed the button for the top floor suite. There was a pin number to enter, which Clara remembered. The lifts at the old place were slow and clanked a lot. There had been time to have a last ponder on what Cyril wanted to see her about. The new lifts were fast and she was there, in the top floor reception area.

"Hi Don.....What sort of mood is he in?" Asked Clara.

"Business is good, the money rolling in. So, Cyril is happy." Said Don. "When are you bringing the nipper in to see us?"

"Soon, I promise it will be soon."

In the old building, you had to walk through a room full of hard looking ruffians, to get to Cyril's lair; the largest office in the building. Now the ruffians had their own office, with just one of them sat close to the lifts. If Don pressed a button connected to the office Wi-Fi, it was 'Cry 'Havoc! ', and let slip the dogs of war.' Some of the ruffians were armed, though Cyril paid the right people a lot of money, to get away with his armed ruffians. Cyril's door was open a fraction, so Clara walked straight in.

"Oh, I was hoping you'd bring Justin." Said Cyril. "You have to bring him in soon."

"I will, but he's still very small.....Soon though, I promise."

Mabina was looking after her son, with Daniel prowling around as backup. Even so, Clara was finding it hard not to call them to make sure everything was alright. Cyril sat at the large coffee table affair in the window, which was good. A good mood and it was the coffee table. A bad mood and Cyril saw you at his desk. There on the coffee table, was a box of the chocolate truffles she loved. It was going to be a good mood day.....He might even be about to ask her for a favour.

"Oh, Cyril.....My favourite treats." Said Clara.

"There would have been champagne too, but with the kid....."

Clara grabbed two chocolate truffles and pushed the box towards Cyril. At one time he used to look over her shoulder, as if hoping Simon might be there. Now he trusted her and rarely even asked if Simon was in the country. Officially, Simon was involved in a personal project in Asia, that could go on for years.

"I need your help Clara." Said Cyril. "I know you need time with your child, but.....Do you remember the gang who took at a shot at you a couple of years ago?"

"In the car park at the Luna Blue; how could I forget." Said Clara. "Serbians I seem to remember, trying to take over the designer narcotics business."

"They were operating out of Belgrade, but my contacts think the bosses are more likely to have been from Kosovo. Not that I really care where they're from.....They're back and in large numbers. They've set up a laboratory only a few miles from here. We had this before.....Leave them alone and it's seen as being weak. We'll get trouble from everyone, all hoping to get some of our business. I need you to send them a very clear message."

Clara liked it when there was action, preferably violent action. After weeks of being effectively fed by Laura and Tim, feeding on the members of a rival drug cartel would be wonderful. There was nothing quite like fighting and drinking fresh, hot blood. Of course, it depended on Cyril's definition of sending a clear message.

"By message.....Do you mean broken bones and a few of them in intensive care?" Asked Clara.

"I mean getting rid of them, Clara." Said Cyril. "There'll be a large extra payment, as I'm sure you'll need to bring in a few experienced helpers. Kill them, kill them all. That is what I call a very clear message."

Cyril would have a file, he always had a file. It would look very like the kind of file kept by special branch and other arms of police intelligence. Cyril paid a lot of money to some very important pillars of the establishment. The occasional file full of reliable data, seemed to be part of the deal.

"I take it you've got a file on these Serbian-Kosovans?" Asked Clara.

"And a few Russians.....I hate to be predictable." Said Cyril.

The buff file came out from under a pile of magazines, the Economist of all things. Clara flicked through it and everything was there, including a floor plan of the newly installed narcotics laboratory.

"I'll probably use Noah, but otherwise.....I'll hire in the expertise I need." Said Clara.

"Fine.....I know I can rely on you to get the job done."

The file mentioned a dozen people almost permanently living in the drugs lab. That was a lot of bodies to leave a very clear message. Cyril must have cleared the body count with his police contacts. As Clara browsed the file, Cyril passed across a simple post it note, with a very long number on it.

"This will be in your bank today, the account in Singapore." Said Cyril. "I hope it meets with your approval."

"It does.....That will buy a lot of nappies and pay his college fees."

"Get it done quickly, Clara."

She offered Cyril another truffle, before putting the file in the box. With the lid on, it was just a box of choc truffles. She crouched down next to Cyril and discovered something useful. His reaction told her that Cyril H Carter, was aware of her being a Nosferatu, a feeder on human blood. Not fear coming off Cyril, he was excited by her breath on his cheek. Clara kissed him on the cheek.

"I'll get the job done in the next few days, Cyril." She said. "I'll make it messy.....I'm sure you'll know when it's done."

"Thank you.....Bring Justin in the next time." Said Cyril.

"I promise.....I will."

Maggie was still on the reception desk, which meant another reminder to bring in her son to be seen and adored. Even if she had to bring every vampire she knew as guards, Clara would definitely bring him in to see where mummy made her serious money.

"Bye Maggs.....Yes, I will bring him in."

Clara had told Noah she'd call an Uber to get home, but there he was. Leaning out of his car window, while drinking coffee out of a plastic cup. She'd told Cyril she'd probably take Noah on the job, but would she? The ex-army guy was tough and built like a whole row of brick outhouses, but he wasn't a vampire. There was a chance that he'd be hurt, maybe even killed.

"I'm glad you came back for me." Said Clara, as she got into the front passenger seat.

"Well.....I was in the area." Said Noah.

"Cyril gave me a job, a really tough and dangerous task." Said Clara. "I'll tell you about it, the money is good. If you hate the sound of it, then I'll find someone else."

A kind of fake consultation to ease her conscience; Noah was certain to say yes to going on the job.

Strange that her conscience needed easing, as vampires weren't supposed to have a conscience.

Clara had noticed though, that a few times in her very long life. Something suspiciously like a conscience, had leapt up and bitten her on the arse.

"What does this job pay ?" Asked Noah.

~ ~

~ Laura and Tim in Brittany ~

"Wow, these guys are serious about their security." Said Tim. "I was expecting lots of old men dressed like monks, not guards with assault rifles."

Tim had been there before; nothing should have been a surprise. It had been a while since they'd been regular visitors to the chateau and so much had happened.

"Nathalie is related to the old French royal family, or at least it's rumoured she is." Said Laura. "The Silver Dawn do seem to be allowed their armed patrols and air defences on the roof. Maybe not officially, but no one has stopped them doing it."

Her Gudara had left them next to a large standing stone, not far from the main building. It was an easy large stone to picture in her mind, and the guards weren't used to seeing her huge muse and protector. Laura began to walk towards the main building, which was an old refurbished chateau. The guards reacted, but she was on their facial recognition system.

"Did you say they have air defences ?" Asked Tim.

"Oh yes, lots of ground to air missiles on the roof." Said Laura. "Another rumour says they were installed by the same people who set up the missile system for the White House."

"You mean the White House in Washington ? The.....White House ?" Asked Tim.

"Oh yes, but it is only a rumour."

She was recognised and a few of the guards actually waved at her. It had been a while since she'd regularly visited the chateau. Laura was determined that now she could move quickly to and from just about anywhere; Tim and her would be regulars at the Silver Dawn HQ. For one thing, her apartment was far nicer than her room at the Hornsey House. There were cleaners in the chateau, so no being expected to run a vacuum cleaner over the floor.

"I can smell food, proper food." Said Tim.

He'd lost two stones since being with her, which she'd put down to an active lifestyle. Not that he'd ever been exactly chubby. Was she starving him without thinking about it ? She did sometimes go days without wanting, or needing to eat. For a few seconds, she had a little bad girlfriend guilt.

"Nathalie will have been told we're in the building." Said Laura. "She'll send for us when she's ready.....Shall we grab something in the refectory ?"

"Oh, yes please." Said Tim.

A corporate conglomerate would have called it the canteen. To an ancient order of occultists, it was the refectory. Quite large and almost in the centre of the building, it was already fairly full. It was self-service at a long counter and all of it was free, another perk of working for the Silver Dawn. Good food.....It was said that visiting businessmen made a point of visiting the refectory.

"I must admit, there is nothing like a fresh croissant." Said Laura.

"And the coffee here is far better than the machine in the kitchen." Said Tim.

They loaded up a tray with all sorts of nibbles and found a table at the far end of the room. Laura noticed that a camera on the wall, had followed them as they'd looked for a table. Nathalie knew they were there, though the head of the order was always polite. She'd let them eat before sending someone for them. Tim dug a spoon into a pot of coronation chicken, which he ate with a contented look on his face.

"Oh, Laura.....Can we eat here every day ?"

"Maybe not every day, but a few times a week."

He'd empty the tray and then eat a heaped up plate of Thai food that night, while watching old movies on DVD. Her bad girlfriend guilt vanished; as she realised he wasn't being starved, he was just greedy. As Laura drank her second cup of excellent coffee, Nathalie sent her PA to fetch them. No introductions and this one was new. It wasn't that Nathalie was a bully, she was far worse. She was a perfectionist. The woman was passing plastic cards to Laura and Tim.

"These are new access cards. You both have full access, even to the old forbidden archive. Even I don't have a card to get in there."

A touch of bitterness in her voice ? Definitely.

"What happened to Mariette ?" Asked Laura.

Polite to ask where the previous PA had got to, Laura had quite liked her.

"Ahh, my predecessor.....She met someone on holiday and they're now married. By the way, I'm Genevieve, though everyone calls me Gen."

And in less than a year, there'd be a new incumbent in the job, explaining where Genevieve had gone. Nathalie really did seem to burn out her PAs.

Nathalie got up from her desk to greet them, which was a rare honour. Mind you, Laura had once been a genuine friend of Horus, an ancient Egyptian God.

"Laura, so pleased to see you.....That will be all Gen." Said Nathalie.

After Gen left the room, Nathalie actually hugged her.

"So sorry to hear about Clara being attacked." Said Nathalie. "It's the child of course her son. A unique child born of a vampire and born of the dead. An abductor could name their own price; though I suspect the Psochics have their own plans for the baby. Dreadful.....Truly dreadful."

"We'll keep him safe.....The bringer of fire has set up wards around the house." Said Laura.

"Sit.....Please sit and I'll get some coffee." Said Nathalie. "I heard rumours that you've someone who knows the famous Karkengara. Very useful.....For a while, everyone thought he was dead."

More of the excellent coffee arrived, with more of the wonderful croissants. There definitely was something about French cuisine, freshly prepared in France.

"Once we're sure of a location for the Psochics, I will help you." Said Nathalie. "I have several fighters like Akiva, who are a little more than simply human. Weapons too.....Sometimes an assault rifle can get the job done better than the sharpest fangs."

Laura remembered a few names, but Nathalie knew a lot of people. For some reason, Laura's mind kept homing in on one specific name.

"Any chance of borrowing David Huynh.....I can remember being surprised by how fast he moved in a fight." Said Laura. "It'd be nice to have him surprise the Psochics."

"I remember David." Said Tim. "He moves like the wind."

"David left us I'm afraid.....Said I drove him away." Said Nathalie. "I get that a lot.....Not that I consider myself to be unreasonable."

"Just a perfectionist." Said Laura.

"Exactly.....David went back to working for the NSA." Said Nathalie. "I have a number for him, but you should call him. I heard he's quite bored where he is. I can't guarantee it, but use a little charm and he might join you."

"Sounds like I should be in Jerusalem, looking for the Psochics." Said Laura.

"Hang on.....You owe me at least one job, now you're finally here." Said Nathalie.

It wasn't a particularly difficult assignment. One of the archivists had removed a book from the library and run off with it. The problem was that the book was incredibly valuable and, as far as

anyone knew, the only surviving copy. Laura accepted the job of course; she owed Nathalie quite a bit of her time. Laura was learning though.....

"I know I have access, but it seems polite to ask." Said Laura. "While I'm here, I'd like to look at some of the really old scrolls, the genuinely scary stuff. I'm looking things up to help Clara. Is that alright?"

"Look at whatever you need to look at." Said Nathalie.

There was more general talk about the people who were either still with the Silver Dawn, or had moved on, or had been killed in one way or another. There was a constant war between different occult orders, which the public knew nothing about. Laura had realised it a while ago, that somewhere an invisible line had been crossed. Her once pushy and demanding boss, had become a friend.

"Your toys are still in your apartment." Said Nathalie. "I hate to say it, but some of your weapons are superior to the ones my guards use."

"Tim loves them.....I'll let him choose which to take on the book recovery job." Said Laura.

"Been a while since I've used firearms." Said Tim. "I quite miss the noise of an assault rifle firing on fully automatic."

"Old Thomas plays at being frail and bit unsteady on his feet, but he's quite dangerous. Useful when he worked for me, but now.....Be careful both of you."

"I remember him; he taught me how to look up records in the archive." Said Laura.

It'd be sad if Old Thomas died in the process of her recovering the book. He'd seemed quite a nice old man, but that might well have been just one of many fake personas. The book was incredibly valuable and Nathalie wanted it back.....So, no matter what it took. Laura would recover the book.

~

~

~ Daniel and his medical report ~

There had been so much going on. Clara was involved in a job for Cyril, which seemed to excite her. She'd even asked him to help her, but without telling him the details. Much to his own amazement, Daniel had agreed. He did actually enjoy a fight and he'd missed out on the battle to protect Justin from the Psochics. It would be fun to fight beside Clara and.....There was the chance to drink the blood of a defeated foe. As long as their heart still beat of course. The blood of the dead had the foulest taste and could actually be toxic to a vampire. Daniel had been watching an old movie on Netflix, when Clara had sat on the edge of the coffee table and leant towards him.....

"Thank you for the PowerPoint documents about my boy's health." Said Clara. "I've looked at them several times and everything seems fine, but.....I need spoken words, not printed reports. Is my son going to be alright?"

"Sorry, it's just been so hectic and we keep missing one another." Said Daniel. "I just wanted you to have something, but PowerPoint isn't for everyone."

"In tiny understandable words, Daniel.....Is Justin Ned Atherton going to be alright?"

Clara was a new mum and like all new mums, she was looking for certainty about the health of her baby. The problem was that there were so many uncertain things involved with her baby's birth. Leaving aside her being a vampire, no one understood the ongoing effect of a tiny jade figurine. Daniel could lie and say everything was fine, or he could tell her it was still effectively a throw of the dice. Hopefully, Laura might find some certainty in the archives of the Silver Dawn.....

"I believe there are lots of forces doing their best to keep Justin alive." Said Daniel. "The jade figurine left something of itself in your boy. It kept him alive when your womb was trying to dissolve the foetus. Now it seems to be putting strange compounds into your milk. These are protecting the child

against the natural pathogens in your body. Short words.....Your toxin that makes humans go to sleep, has no effect on your boy.”

“Finally.....Something I can understand.” Said Clara.

“Laura is digging through the archives at the Silver Dawn for more information.” Said Daniel. “I know it’s not what you want to hear, but we may never be certain about the boy’s health. He’s unique, there are no medical precedents. I believe Justin will be around for centuries, but nothing is ever going to be a hundred percent certain.”

Clara actually hugged him, despite the tears rolling down her face. Tears of happiness and joy ? Or tears of misery ? Daniel was quite good at reading such things and decided she was happy.

“Thank you, Daniel.....That was exactly what I needed to hear.” Said Clara.

~

~

© Ed Cowling ~ May 2025