

**Clara Copley**

**(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)**

### **Chapter 14 – Hidden Rooms**

**“You must know I’ve been looking over the hidden rooms ?” Asked Niña.**

**“Yes, I did hear.....You need to be very careful.” Said Clara. “The further you delve into those rooms, the harder it is to find the way back. Eventually you may never find a way out. You need a guide really and Karkengara tends to get over enthusiastic about those rooms. I could take you as far as Dragon Courtyard, if you’d like me to ?”**

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Noah had been expecting to turn up alone for his first day as manager of the Luna Blue. He’d prepared himself for all the obvious questions about Rory, the previous incumbent in the job. He’d talked it over with Clara one night when she’d been bathing Justin.

“Keep it simple, Noah.” Clara had suggested. “Rory and his girlfriend vanished together. Say that you’re assuming they ran off together before the crap hit the fan. Make up your own story if you like, but tell me the details so that I know what it is.”

The staff at the Luna Blue would guess the truth anyway, but it could never be officially known. Rory had betrayed Cyril, which meant his life expectancy had become effectively zero. Others had vanished in the past, though not so many that it looked like a pattern. All Noah had to do was put together a plausible lie and keep to it. As it was, Clara was with him as he entered the back door of the Luna.

“Builders.....Niña hired some very good, but staggeringly noisy builders.” Clara had said. “Be nice to get away from them for a while.”

Noah had been kept in the loop, now that he’d sort of moved into the house in Hornsey. It seemed the house was going to get a complete refurbishment and better burglar proofing. All the things Hacker Jim’s friend was supposed to have done, but hadn’t. Clara laughed as they entered the main office of the Luna. She’d been at the right angle to see the banners and balloons.

“Wow, someone pulled out all the stops.” Said Clara.

“We all helped.” Said Margot.

Margot Mace was tall, thin and rumoured to be in her mid-fifties. Not that anyone had ever dared to ask for a definite age. A widow, which was agreed on by everyone. Margot had worked for Cyril for years and one or two of the long termers had met her husband. Margot looked after the financial paperwork of the place and her desk was surrounded by filing cabinets.

“I went out and bought everything.” Added Daniel.

Daniel had arrived as a work experience trainee during his last year of secondary education. For some reason he was nineteen now and still there; still officially a trainee. Clara said she liked the boy, as did most of the people in the office. His longevity as a trainee seemed to be based on being likeable and keeping himself busy.

“It’s all.....Wow, thank you everybody.” Said Noah.

The banners, decorations and balloons, had been stuck everywhere. The general theme was ‘Welcome Noah,’ though there were a few which simply welcomed the new manager. It was a nice way to put the new guy at his ease and Noah was grinning from ear to ear.

"There's some nibbles for lunch.....And some wine." Said Margot.

A kind of all day party by the sound of it, with occasional moments of work. Someone must have agreed it with Cyril though. Cyril was easy going unless he thought someone was taking the piss. Yes, someone would have called him about the welcome Noah party.

"Drinks on me tonight, at the Black Horse." Said Noah. "Thank you all, it's nice to get a warm welcome."

"Any news about Rory ?" Janice asked.

Janice was about twenty and according to Clara; employed for what her appointment letter called general clerical duties. Normally Clara would have never bothered going through staff records, but the Luna had begun to feel important to her. She did spend a lot of time there.

"No, sorry, Janice." Said Noah. "It looks like Rory did a runner."

A few people laughed, which was a good sign. Most would suspect that Rory had contracted a fatal case of betraying Cyril. They didn't know it for a fact though and the laughter by a few, meant they weren't certain. Like Jimmy Hoffa, people would be wondering about Rory's fate for years to come.

"Come sit at my desk, Noah." Clara said. "I deliberately have it out of earshot from the open plan."

Noah was going to be sat where Rory used to sit, right in the centre of the open plan. Great if you needed to talk to anyone and everyone during the day, but Clara preferred her quiet corner. Noah sat on the opposite side of her desk, his gaze still fixed on the welcoming banners and balloons.

"I really wasn't expecting them to do something like that." Said Noah.

"Neither was I.....Must have been their idea." Said Clara. "Cyril would never have asked them to do it, it's not his thing."

Clara had muttered about making an excuse to leave by mid-morning. Now she'd mentioned looking forward to the nibbles and wine for lunch. She was still feeding Justin, but had obviously decided that one glass of wine wouldn't harm her child. After all, he was a vampire.

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Tim liked the hotel in Munich, with its five stars and all night room service. Once he'd dreamt of being able to live in such a hotel and be pampered twenty four hours a day, every day of the year. It was a Hyatt hotel, but Tim wasn't concerned with who owned it. The food menu he could order from at three in the morning, was superb. Not that he'd had cheese burgers in the early hours, they'd only just arrived. The cheeseburgers would be ordered one night though, he was sure of it. He was unpacking, after shooing away a hotel employee, who wanted to do it for him. There were limits to how much of the contents of his case, he wanted a stranger to see.

"Unpacking for you.....I remember them trying that nonsense in Baku." Said Tim.

"I let them do my unpacking.....What have you got in you bags ?" Asked Laura.

"Nothing weird.....It's just my personal things." Said Tim.

If Laura didn't get it, she probably never would. They were like chalk and cheese, but she was still the only woman he'd ever truly loved. As he turned to put his shirts on hangers, he realised he still knew where Laura was.

"Wow, I can see you.....Can't explain how, but I know where you are." Said Tim. "Even with my back to you, I can see you."

"The new skills are arriving." Said Laura. "Can you turn into a bat yet ?"

"Yeah, very amusing."

"I had Simon teasing me after I was turned and he was merciless." Said Laura.

"You're like a red dot in my head." Said Tim. "I think I'll always know where you are, even if you're in another country."

“Clara used to say that about Simon.” Said Laura. “We do have a battle mode, a way our senses change during a fight. No, Tim.....I’m not teasing. You need to hunt and feed, so we might as well do it in Munich. Later tonight I’ll take you hunting.”

“We did a lot of that for Clara.” Said Tim.

“Trust me; it’s different when you’re hunting for blood for you to feed on.” Said Laura.

“At least I know all the rules.” Said Tim. “Rule one.....Don’t get caught.”

“Most important out of all the rules.” Said Laura.

Adelaide Ducomble had her own room in the hotel, though it was on a different floor. It shouldn’t have been a surprise that she knocked on their door while they were still having breakfast, but it was. They’d used a lot of hotels in a lot of different countries, but rarely travelled with anyone else.

“Adelaide.....Have you eaten ?” Asked Laura. “We have coffee, but I can quickly order you breakfast.”

“I ate in my own room, but I’ll say yes to that coffee.” Said Adelaide.

Adelaide had given them the key information on the Hand of Albrecht and who might be currently in possession of the strange artefact. There had been warnings to go with the description and where to look for it. Adelaide was a respected member of the Silver Dawn. Her warnings about the Hand though; it was all too weird and strange to be believable. Tim poured coffee for Adelaide and wondered if the owner of the Red Rose, was now connected to them, all day. She was interesting, but Tim had envisaged a lot of tourist time with just the two of them.

“Did I mention the school when we talked in Brittany ?” Asked Adelaide.

“The School of Esoteric Wisdom, Schule der Esoterischen Weisheit.” Said Laura. “Yes, it was mentioned once or twice.”

“Strange but wonderful name for a school.” Said Tim.

“You need to be a powerful occultist to pass the student entry test.” Said Adelaide. “Post graduate studies only of course.”

“Don’t encourage Tim; he’s already obsessing about the place.” Said Laura.

“I was going to suggest we go there, after we’ve finished our coffee.” Said Adelaide.

There was a car in a hotel car park somewhere, a car they’d hired at the airport. The hotel would be able to find it and they’d be on their way. Tim didn’t want to seem too keen, just in case Laura wanted to delay a visit to the strange sounding school.

“Might be fun, Adelaide.” Said Tim.

Adelaide Ducomble had a few foibles, including not liking having her name shortened. Fair enough, Tim believed everyone had a right to be called, whatever they wanted to be called. Within reason of course. No Hitlers or anything too genital based. Adelaide was a bit of a mouthful, but he was getting used to it.

“Yes, we’ll go.....I’ll call the front desk and say we need our car.” Said Laura.

Tim was beginning to get an idea of vampire fighting mode, or whatever fancy name Laura had for it. At the mention of visiting the school, in search of a dangerous artefact, his new vampire heart had started beating slightly faster. His vision became almost monochrome, but very clear. His hearing became clearer too, though some mundane sounds were filtered out. Tim was surprised when he realised he could hear Laura’s heart beating.

“Wow.” Said Tim. “More new skills arriving.”

“No using heavy machinery until you’re used to them.” Said Laura. “I’ll drive.”

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Niña needed support to explore the hidden rooms, she realised that. She had recovered her drawings though, without understanding how they'd ended up in a locked away bedroom in Hornsey. Karkengara had mentioned Clara using the rooms to watch Simon. He'd also mentioned that happening some time ago. It implied some kind of peephole in time, but only Clara would know for certain. Would Clara want to discuss it ? She could be talkative one moment and downright taciturn the next. Niña had invited Clara to see her drawings, hoping to get a few answers about the mysterious locked away rooms. The drawings were on the wall of the room under the stairs. She'd framed them all and bought picture hooks when on a shopping trip for the house.

"Well, what do you think ?" Asked Niña.

"I saw some of these when I visited Simon a while ago." Said Clara. "Not for long and they were in a room only lit by a single oil lamp. Now they look so much better. Lovely, Niña.....Your drawings make me think of summer gardens."

It was wonderful, just the kind of comment Niña was hoping for. Clara looked genuinely impressed, with Niña's drawings of Simon's garden in Florence and the older and more mature garden in Grizzana. Niña had particularly liked that house. It was where the two vampires had taken her in as a rescued street urchin. Why had Simon and Giovanni taken her in ? Not to abuse her, they'd both treated her like a much loved kid sister. When he was drunk one night, Giovanni had said she was his one good deed, among a mass of bad deeds.

"I love the technology in this age." Said Niña. "If you wanted, I could get copies made of these drawings ? They'd look really nice on the nursery wall."

"Yes, that would be wonderful." Said Clara. "As Justin grows and gets older, you could tell him all about Grizzana. I wouldn't mind you telling him about Simon's life there. All little boys want to hear about their father."

"You must know I've been looking over the hidden rooms ?" Asked Niña.

"Yes, I did hear.....You need to be very careful." Said Clara. "The further you delve into those rooms, the harder it is to find the way back. Eventually you may never find a way out. You need a guide really and Karkengara tends to get over enthusiastic about those rooms. I could take you as far as Dragon Courtyard, if you'd like me to ?"

Niña had no idea what Dragon Courtyard was, but Clara as a guide in the locked off rooms was perfect. Far better than Niña had hoped for. She'd already had her own ideas about making sure she'd never get stuck in the locked off rooms for eternity.

"Oh, Clara.....Yes please." Said Niña. "Can we go to Dragon Courtyard tomorrow ?"

"I can hear Daniel going on about the impetuousness of young vampires."

Clara was laughing, but Niña could imagine it too. Wanting to go the next day indeed. It had been said though and she felt a need to carry on with the idea.

"I'm sure Ronnie and Mabina would love to look after Justin, while you're gone." Said Niña.

They would, because Niña had already recruited them to do just that. There had been a little quid pro quo on chores and duties, but nothing she wasn't happy to do.

"Your mind seems set on going." Said Clara. "Do you understand the risks involved ?"

"I do, I understand the dangers." Said Niña.

"Very well.....I have a job to do for Cyril in the morning." Said Clara. "In the afternoon, you and I will go through the first set of rooms. We'll go all the way to Dragon Courtyard."

Tempting to ask what Dragon Courtyard was, but as Clara seemed to assume she already knew. Niña decided to smile and try to look wise and well informed.

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The School of Esoteric Wisdom had a wonderful name, but it wasn't in any of the best parts of town. Well out to the east of the city, it had probably once stood alone. The only large building in a predominantly rural area. Now it was surrounded by new buildings, homes for a growing population. The school was in amongst streets of well built, but uninspiring starter homes. There was a high wall around the school and a couple of acres of land. The only way in appeared to be by knocking on the large front door.

"Not what I was expecting." Said Laura.

"I've been here before." Said Adelaide. "I'm told it was far more impressive in the early nineteen hundreds."

They parked the other side of the road from the school. It was a large building, which reminded Laura of trips to the National Gallery in London. A grand old building, but it looked a little grubby and out of place. Not that the location was likely to worry those who came there to study.

"So, it looks like we're knocking on their door." Said Tim.

"They won't like us being here." Said Adelaide. "The Hand may be dangerous to have in their artefact collection, but that doesn't mean they'll want us to have it."

"Is there likely to be a fight?" Asked Laura.

"I hope not, but it could happen." Said Adelaide. "If lots of men and women in robes enter the room we're in, prepare to defend yourselves."

They'd heard why the Hand of Albrecht was so dangerous from Adelaide and Nathalie knew some its history. Elias Albrecht was Austrian rather than German. He was one of those people who might end up a huge success at their chosen profession, or end up on the streets as a down and out. It seems that even Albrecht's mother thought he was likely to get arrested one day.

"Ok, prepare yourselves.....Time to call on the wise students of the esoteric." Said Adelaide.

They left the car and Tim needed a little refresher on the history of the Hand.

"So, Albrecht ended up being hugely influential?" He asked.

"Yes, everyone wanted to be his friend." Said Adelaide. "It was the hand of course; all of his wealth and influence was because of the hand."

Nathalie had known about Elias Albrecht, it seemed Old Thomas claimed to have met the great man. Where had the eponymous hand come from? It seemed that Albrecht had once joined an expedition of occultists to Libya. Everyone seemed to be doing it then; even Aleister Crowley had once gone trudging out into the Libyan Desert. Benghazi was the favourite start point when Albrecht and a few friends, had gone looking for items of power. By some weird quirk of fate, Albrecht had stumbled across the tomb where the Hand had been placed by a long dead King of Egypt.

"I've rung the bell a dozen times." Said Adelaide. "Do we come back tonight and go over the wall?"

"Let me try.....No one bangs on a door quite like a vampire." Said Laura, who began to use her fists and feet to batter against the door.

Before it was called the Hand of Albrecht, it had been known as the Fist of Choronzon. No one knew Albrecht, until possessing the Hand brought him power and influence. All occultists knew about the Demon Choronzon though; some even considered him to be a minor deity. Touch someone's skin with the hand and they were yours, enthralled in a way no one really understood. Of course Albrecht had begun using the Hand on people who might be useful to him. By the time of his death, Elias Albrecht was reputed to be the wealthiest individual in Germany. Why was the Hand so potentially dangerous? Choronzon had a good sense of humour; he was actually famed for it. Sometimes those touched by the Hand weren't enthralled by the one using it. Sometimes they were killed by an

horrific and agonising death. There were a variety of deaths, seemingly chosen at random. All of them were staggeringly gruesome and painful.

"There is someone the other side of the door.....I can feel them." Said Tim.

"More new skills.....You're beginning to make me jealous." Said Laura.

There were several locks, Laura could hear them all being unlocked and bolts being pulled back. Eventually a tiny woman in a brown robe, was looking at them. She was blinking, as though the morning sunshine wasn't something she was used to.

"The professor is out." Said the woman.

"I've been here before." Said Adelaide. "There were lots of professors here then. The place was awash with professors. Are they all out?"

The woman blinked at them again, before giving what was probably her usual response to unsolicited callers.

"The professor is out." Said the woman.

Laura was already bored with being told the professor was out. She walked past the woman and into a large, poorly lit entrance lobby. All the windows were shuttered. Were they all vampires at the school? There were other creatures who preferred the dark of course. Tim followed her in and eventually Adelaide walked past the woman in brown robes.

"Please tell your manager that Adelaide Ducombe is here."

"We're not used to being kept waiting." Added Tim.

The woman opened her mouth and Laura was waiting for her to say it again, that the professor was out. They had walked right past her though, which was enough to make anyone think twice.

"I'll see if the Monseigneur will see you." Said the woman.

With that she left, through a door at the back of the entrance lobby. They were left, with no offer of refreshments and a choice of dusty chairs to sit on.

"Now things are moving, the Monseigneur owns the school." Said Adelaide.

"Does he have a full name?" Asked Laura.

"He's Monseigneur Gérard Mariette." Said Adelaide. "Though everyone knows him simply as the Monseigneur."

The tiny woman in brown robes, took a while to return; at least half an hour. She appeared at one of the doors at the rear of the lobby, waving at them.

"He will see you now." Said the woman.

She took them, along several corridors to end up in front of the oldest elevator Laura had ever seen. Far too clunky to normally trust her precious body with, but Adelaide seemed desperate to see the Monseigneur.

"We're going up to the fifth floor." Said the woman.

"Does the lift usually make it to the fifth floor?" Asked Laura.

"Old but reliable.....It'll get us there." Said the woman.

It clunked, banged and made whirring noises, but the ancient elevator did get them to the fifth floor.

The corridor there was cleaner than the entrance lobby, with expensive looking rugs and hall furniture. It really did look like the floor where the boss would have his rooms.

"He's waiting for you, the room with the yellow door." Said the woman.

She went back down in the clunking and banging lift, which Laura thought showed an heroic and determined nature. They were left looking at the one yellow door, when all the others were red.

"I'm getting a bad feeling about this." Said Tim.

"So am I.....Be ready for anything." Said Laura.

No one had asked if they were armed and like Tim, Laura was armed with just her fangs and preternatural strength. It was a bit of a surprise when Adelaide took a gun out of the bag she'd been carrying most of the morning. Laura had guns of her own and knew a Glock thirty two when she saw one.

"Don't worry.....I know how to shoot straight." Said Adelaide.

"I'm delighted to hear that." Said Tim.

They walked slowly and Laura became more certain of it with every step. There were armed guards beyond the yellow door, guards with the intention of killing them.

"No hesitation.....If they attack us, we kill them all." Said Laura.

"I have no problem with that." Said Adelaide.

Somewhere deep inside, Laura was ready and hoping things did turn nasty. She knew Tim would be feeling the same. It was all part of being a vampire; they lived for the fight and the chance to feed on the blood of an enemy.

"Feed if you get a chance, Tim." Said Laura. "Nothing will ever taste quite as good again.....As the hot blood, straight from the throat of your first defeated enemy."

"I almost wish I was a vampire." Said Adelaide.

Close to the yellow door and Laura knew there were a lot of beating human hearts in the room behind the door. Not an unbeatable number of humans, but there had to be close to twenty of them.

"Keep behind me, Adelaide." Said Laura. "Shoot anyone who aims in my direction."

"How about me ?" Asked Tim.

"You'll be fine.....Rip them apart, Tim." Said Laura. "Rip the bastards apart."

The yellow door was made of wood, with no metal banding to reinforce it. Just an ordinary wooden door and Laura had it open with just one kick. The door crashed across the room beyond, colliding with a man holding a sword.

"Here we go !" Yelled Adelaide.

No guns in the room, the men in brown robes were all armed with swords, or wicked looking hand axes. When Adelaide fired her Glock, the sound was deafening. Laura went straight for the man in the expensive suit, tie and shoes. He had to be the Monseigneur and she'd always wanted to taste the blood of a Monseigneur.

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"It's been a while since I was here." Said Clara. "There's far more dust everywhere. It's a bit of mystery where it comes from, these are locked off rooms."

"Dust gets everywhere." Said Niña.

Clara had opened the door to the hidden rooms and it had caused a wave of nostalgia to hit her. It had been a long time since she'd been in the corridor. The room where she'd watched Simon wasn't that far away. The rooms had several places where she'd watched Simon and Giovanni, in their house in Grizzana. She'd even seen Niña pottering about the house. Not that windows to Italy at the time of the Medici, was all that the rooms could accomplish. Clara looked around, getting her bearings.

"Never open the doors close to the entrance, Niña." Said Clara. "There are some tortured souls in those rooms.....You'll hear and see some dreadful things."

"I opened one door and heard the screaming. Never again will I open that door." Said Niña.

"Good.....We need to go as far as we can along this corridor." Said Clara.

Laura had explored the hidden rooms; they were on the same floor as her bedroom. The last time Laura had been to look at the rooms, she'd said things were different. There was a partition across the corridor, a large one with two doors in it. Only now there were door frames, but no doors.

"This had changed, there used to be doors here." Said Clara.

"Karkengara told me this place is always changing." Said Niña.

"You need to be tough when you come here." Said Clara. "Don't let the bringer of fire fill your head with his poetic nonsense."

At the very end of the corridor there had been a red door. Much to Clara's relief, the red door was still there. She pushed the door open and it was still there, the beautiful golden statue of a dragon. Not full size of course, it was about four feet high. On the side of its head was a small button, but you had to know it was there. Laura had mentioned it taking her hours to find the damn thing.

"This is our first dragon.....And our first chance to get lost in the rooms." Said Clara. "It's very important for you to follow me everywhere.....And keep close to me."

"I will, I promise."

Clara remembered the dragon statue with some fondness; it had opened the way to watching Simon, as he went about his life in Italy. Piero Rossi had been his name then, though he no longer used that name.

"Don't let me down dragon." Said Clara. "You know where I usually go from here."

She pressed the button on the side of its head and for a brief few seconds, the golden statue looked like a living, breathing dragon. It flapped its wings and a door appeared in the wall, to the right of the dragon.

"Good, that'd be the right door." Said Clara. "That way will take us to the Dragon Courtyard."

"And if it hadn't opened the right door?" Asked Niña.

"Then, dear Niña.....We'd have been going that way, to somewhere else."

Clara let the dragon settle and become a statue again, before she opened the new door in the wall. There was another corridor beyond the door, but it was much cleaner.

"Good.....Far less dust here." Said Clara.

"I'm enjoying all this." Said Niña

"That's the spirit." Muttered Clara.

Last time it had been the third door on the left, but things changed. Not that Clara was worried, she'd know if it was the right door, the instant her hand touched the handle.

"No, not this door.....There have been lots of changes." Said Clara.

Clara wasn't silly; she had a few options if they became hopelessly lost in the hidden rooms. She might not want Karkengara with them, but he had a pretty good idea where she was going to take Niña. If they didn't show up for a day or so, he was bound to look for them. Laura and her Gudara were another option. He could probably even sense where they were. There was the question of food and water of course, which meant they were both carrying large bags. Being vampires they could carry quite a lot of bottled water and tins.....Wonderful tins, the long lasting, open and eat, instant food. Clara's hand seemed to tingle, as she tried another door.

"This is it.....Stay really close to me, this bit is.....Fiddly." Said Clara.

Beyond the door was a small library, which Clara disliked. It was easy to hold a grudge against a room, if it had come close to trapping you.....Twice. Clara entered the library and felt Niña, who was almost treading on her feet.

"Good.....Stay as close as that." Said Clara.

"What do we do in here?" Asked Niña.



"Pull three of the books forward a little." Said Clara. "Two are always the same and I know where they are. The third changes every damned time.....That one is.....Fiddly."

The books were large and heavy; some were likely to be priceless antiques. Clara knew the two books which never changed. She moved them forward and somewhere, something giggled.

"Is that ominous or encouraging ?" Asked Niña.

"I'm not sure yet." Said Clara. "As I mentioned, this place changes."

It was a small library, no more than two thousand books on a variety of hardwood bookshelves. The problem was that if Clara picked the wrong book, they might well become trapped in the library.

Clara sat on the floor, her back against a wall. Niña sat next to her, as close as she could.

"There is a system, but I bet that has changed." Said Clara.

"It can't be impossible." Said Niña.

"You're right, but it will take some thought, Niña. Look over the book titles, but don't move any of them. Read the spines and see if any mean anything to you."

"That sounds a bit vague." Said Niña.

"Yes and the next place we need to go, is even more vague and whimsical." Said Clara.

Clara watched Niña muttering at herself, as she went along row after row of huge ancient tomes.

Before the link had been to Simon, but those who ran the hidden rooms weren't stupid. Somewhere in amongst the book, would be one that made Niña think; hey, this is it ! Clara knew things were getting serious, when Niña dug around in her bag for a pen and notebook.

"How long do we have to do this ?" Asked Niña.

"For as long as it takes." Said Clara. "There is no moving on, without selecting the right book."

"And it'll be a book aimed at me ?"

"Yes, this test is one hundred percent yours." Said Clara.

Niña pulled a face and she was right; it felt quite unfair to Clara. It was three hours and a packet of biscuits later, before Niña showed her the names of two books.

"I found two books that ring my bell." Said Niña. "I have The House of Medici by Christopher Hibbert. Personally that means most to me, but I only read it quite recently. Then there's Nuova Cronica by Giovanni Villani, which actually describes the ravages of the Flux. As I nearly died from the Flux, Nuova Cronica might be my choice."

Clara knew which one she'd pick for Niña. Nuova Cronica was written at the time of the Medici and the Library seemed to love its old epic tomes. It wasn't her choice though, Niña had to choose.

"Right or wrong, the choice must be yours." Said Clara.

"Can't you give me a hint ?"

"If I do, the library will hear." Said Clara. "We may well be locked in here, simply because I gave you a hint."

Poor Niña, there was a lot of muttering about the two books, that might be the right one, or they might not. The Flux was muttered about a lot, so the girl's choice wasn't a surprise.

"I choose Nuova Cronica, which translates to The New Chronicle." Said Niña.

"Move it then, just move it slightly forward on the shelf." Said Clara.

That took a while, with the girl moving her hand forward, only to pull it back again. It was an important decision, but it shouldn't have taken Niña that long to move the book. Eventually Niña gave Nuova Cronica a tug and it came forward about an inch. No giggles this time, the disembodied voice gave a loud gasp.

"That's it, I know the routine." Said Clara. "We may now leave the library and move on."

Clara pushed against the right of the bookcase she'd pushed so often before. Niña would have found the right spot, given time. It was just easier to push the bookcase and see an amazed looking Niña.

"Not magic, I've passed this way a few times before." Said Clara.

Another clean corridor, with just one door at the end. Clara opened the door and they were inside a large room, almost worthy of being called a chamber.

"Is the Dragon courtyard much further ?" Asked Niña.

"It is and there are more places where we might get stuck." Said Clara. "For a few rooms we can relax though, the way is easy and I know most of the route very well. Just hope there aren't too many changes."

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