

Clara Copley

(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 8 - Hotels And Cellars

"Clara was like a daughter to him, a five hundred and twenty something, years old daughter. She had a wild streak, which included getting drunk in exotic places and enjoying room service in five star hotels. Daniel knew even just being along for the ride, was going to be amazing."

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Once again, the room in her house Mabina used as a trauma unit and general medical facility was busy. There had been a lot of minor cuts, grazes and a few deep wounds, after the cartel wars in Colindale. All the minor damage had been easy to fix for someone with Mabina's years of experience. Noah was still there and was likely to be there for a while yet. Clara looked at him, connected up to several drips and a machine that gave his key stats, including his heart rate. His heart was beating a little too fast. Mabina was putting that down to his body healing and Clara trusted her judgement.

"Don't worry Clara, he's doing well." Said Mabina. "My expert care and two pints of O negative blood.....It was touch and go for a while, but he'll live."

Clara had stood next to a lot of people being treated in that room. Mabina had lost a few patients, but her success rate had to be fairly impressive. If she said Noah would live, he'd live. That made Clara feel happy, very happy. When Noah was totally fit, Clara had decided to sleep with him.

"I heard from Laura last night." Said Clara. "She has her own ways of travelling around the globe. She's staying near the Old City of Jerusalem. She has a full Silver Dawn special ops team with her and a few.....Interesting individuals. She needs a few days to reconnoitre where the Psochics are based. That gives me time to investigate who betrayed us.....Who nearly got Noah killed."

"Do you still think it was Rory?" Asked Mabina.

"Yes, I do.....Once he's dealt with I'll fly to Jerusalem." Said Clara.

"Oh, I hate flying." Said Mabina.

"So do I, but it's quick and unlike Laura.....I don't have a Gudara." Said Clara.

Simon had always said that you never heard of horse drawn transport, crashing into a hillside from thirty thousand feet. Air travel was a great equaliser.....If a plane crashed in a ball of flames, the vampires would die with everyone else. There were trains of course and cruise ships still crossed the oceans. Slow, but time wasn't a problem if you were an immortal.

"Don't worry; I'll take good care of Noah." Said Mabina. "A good looking man.....Are you considering sleeping with him?"

"You too ! Everyone seems obsessed with my sex life." Said Clara. "Being truthful.....Send him to Jerusalem when he recovers. I can see us celebrating his return to health, in a very hot and sweaty way."

"Don't kill the guy." Said Mabina, with a smile on her face.

Noah hadn't been sedated; he was just sleeping more than an old Tom Cat. Clara leant down and kissed him on the lips.

"See you in Jerusalem." Said Clara.

Noah opened his eyes for a moment and he seemed to be smiling at her. The next moment he was asleep again, as his body repaired itself.

"Call me when Rory is dead." Said Mabina. "I can tell Noah the good news."

"I have to be certain Rory is the traitor." Said Clara. "I need to hear it from his own lips."

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Laura had quite liked the idea of staying in a comfortable hotel in Jerusalem. She'd stayed at two different hotels there over the years and both had been good. The American Colony Hotel had been her favourite. Lots of swaying green palms and a huge outdoor pool. She didn't expect Nathalie to pick up the bill; her days of impecuniosity were long gone. Laura had the kind of bank balance that would have amazed her teenage self.

"We could sneak away and into a hotel." Said Laura. "Nathalie knows Adelaide though; they're old friends from way back. This place is safe and.....Nathalie wants the entire team under the same roof. Makes sense I suppose.....But if you hate it here ? We can go to a hotel."

"Living underground would never be my first choice." Said Tim. "Now we're here and unpacked.....I quite like the place. Be nice to get out most days and see some sunlight. But on the whole.....The Rose Garden will do me."

The Rose Garden was a restaurant just outside the walls of the Old City. Owned and run by Adelaide Ducombe, it was famous and getting a table at the weekend, could be tough. Under the very successful restaurant were two large cellars. There was enough space to house fifty and give them somewhere to store their equipment. The Rose Garden was effectively the Jerusalem headquarters of the Silver Dawn. Jerusalem had miles and miles of tunnels beneath where tourists visited the famous sites. Some of those tunnels could be accessed from the lower cellar of Adelaide's wonderful restaurant.

"According to David Huynh; all our meals come from the restaurant's kitchen." Said Laura. "A week or so of five star food and we may never want to go home."

Laura was in front, as they went down four flights of stairs and into the lowest level, below the deepest cellar. It was an area to store and test weapons and explosives. In theory the huge stone walls would contain any accidental blast. Laura had seen enough ruined weapon stores, to know nothing could guarantee to contain any huge bang, or boom.

"Good morning, Thomas." Said Laura. "Do the facilities meet with your approval ?"

"Everything is as I'd expect from dear Adelaide.....Perfect." Said Thomas.

Old Thomas had been smug and arrogant in Brittany, until he'd seen Nathalie to give her the missing scroll. What had been said, or done ? Hard to say, but Thomas had been a different man after meeting Nathalie Aurigny. Humble and maybe not exactly eager to please, but he was now far more helpful. Laura had a theory that Nathalie had told Thomas, how close he'd come to a slow and unpleasant death. Nothing quite like it to focus someone's thoughts.

"I heard that your Gudara knows a Djinn." Said Thomas. "Better still, one sympathetic to our cause."

"No names, no history, Thomas." Said Laura. "The Djinn will help us and then we may never see her again."

"A she.....That's one clue you've given me." Said Thomas.

Tim was giving Laura a look; one that seemed to say, see.....If you'd let me kill him.

"Your face is well known, Thomas." Said Laura. "Always wear a hood when you go out. Being officially dead is one thing, but try not to make it the real thing."

After Thomas, Laura had really wanted to talk to Amir. She'd often seen the Seer-Shaman in Brittany, mainly because everyone ate in the refectory. Working with someone was different to giving

someone a wave as they had breakfast. Fighting beside someone was different yet again. Laura was determined to know what made Amir tick, before they were both dodging Psochic bullets and spells. She left a message with David that she'd like to talk to Amir when she returned.

"Ok, who are we seeing next?" Asked Tim.

"With a little luck, the Psochics." Said Laura. "We're here to reconnoitre, so.....Do you fancy a little reconnoitring?"

"Yes please.....Aren't we supposed to stay near the Red Rose?" Asked Tim.

"In theory, yes.....I need to get a good direct look into their base." Said Laura. "Then I can use my Gudara to take me there, right inside their headquarters."

Laura had been teasing Thomas about his well-known face, but hers was even better known to the Psochics. She had been one of them, until Simon had decided to swap sides, or it might have been Clara who'd decided to join the Silver Dawn. Laura was taking a risk by going anywhere near the Psochic base, but it was a risk worth taking.

"Come on, Tim.....It'll be fun." Said Laura. "We can use the underground tunnels."

The entrances were secured and guarded. The Red Rose didn't want lots of uninvited guests arriving through the miles of tunnels under the Old City. Laura knew the various words and phrases, to get past the guards and into the tunnels. Most of the tunnels had lighting of some kind; they were the routes around the city for thieves, dealers in stolen goods and those who simply didn't want to be seen. Occasionally they'd need the flashlights they'd been given by Adelaide Ducombe.

"Be careful in the tunnels." Adelaide had said. "Even a vampire may find dangerous enemies in the tunnels."

The tunnels had an odour, but it wasn't that unpleasant. Centuries of partial flooding and unwashed bodies were bound to leave their scent, but it wasn't that bad. Tim didn't even comment and he usually hated places with a bad stink. Some parts of the tunnels were famous, but most were unknown to the tourists. Some were even unknown to the authorities who ran Jerusalem. Laura estimated they were right under the Old City, before she sensed a human heartbeat. She touched Tim on the arm and whispered.

"Someone ahead.....Just one." She whispered. "Walk slowly and quietly. There's a good chance they won't notice us."

Laura liked the word internecine; it seemed to sum up the nonstop troubles in the Middle East. Not just the Jews and Muslims, even the different Muslim groups tended to see each other as rivals. Internecine meant a war that might well destroy everyone involved. Never was that truer than in the tunnels under the Old City. Anyone you encountered below ground might try and kill you, because.....You might try to kill them. It was just part of the insanity that was constantly being played out in the region. As for Laura and the Silver Dawn? Like most with no part to play in the game, they tried to be neutral. Sometimes that could feel like trying to walk a tightrope over the Niagara Falls.

"Stop.....They're moving closer." Whispered Laura. "Stay here; I'll look them over."

Laura could either move silently, but slowly; or she could move fast, but not quite as silently. She moved fast and the man holding an AK47 heard her. He was in a side tunnel, with his gun up and ready to fire. Laura struck him, before he could shoot her. Not a gentle blow, he'd be unconscious for a while. She positioned him on his side to help him breathe. His heart had a steady beat and he was breathing alright when she left him.

"One young guy.....I dealt with him." Laura told Tim.

"Is he dead?"

"Just out for a while.....He'll have one hell of a headache." Said Laura.

All part of the internecine madness. He might have been a warrior for some form of ideology, or guarding a shipment of contraband about to be moved through the tunnels. Laura didn't really care, as long as he wasn't shooting at them. The tunnels could be a busy major route, or quiet as the grave. Luckily it was a quiet day. They'd walked another two miles, before Laura knew they needed to turn left.

"Here.....This tunnel." Said Laura. "Not long now.....Soon we'll be at the Psochic base."

"You did a good job of memorising the maps." Said Tim.

"If I get lost I can always summon my Gudara." Said Laura. "He'll get us back to the Red Rose."

When Laura noticed a group of heartbeats the other side of a solid stone wall; she realised they were in the right place. There it was on the other side of six feet of stone wall, the Psochic base. They were in a rarely used passageway, which meant no lights apart from their flashlights. Tim actually slapped the brown stone wall with his hand.

"How do we see through this ?" Asked Tim.

"Sometimes it's hot down here and it's always humid." Said Laura. "There will be vents somewhere.....And probably more than one way in. Hidden of course and out of the way, but we'll find it."

An hour and lots of trudging later and they hadn't found any kind of door. They'd looked; they'd delved into all the darkest corners. Tim had accidentally disturbed a truly huge rat. Laura had discovered that the Tim could scream like a girl, but she still loved him just as much. Tim redeemed himself by discovering the vent, right up against the ceiling. The light in whatever was beyond the vent was so dull; it was a miracle Tim had noticed it. A ten feet high ceiling, Laura had to stand on Tim's shoulders to see beyond the narrow vent in the wall.

"Good job you don't weigh that much." Said Tim.

"That comment I like, but never dare to call me skinny." Said Laura.

"Scrawny alright ?"

"Bastard."

It had to be the Psochic base she could see through the vent, it was the only building in the right position on the map. The clincher was the guard who did a quick walk through while she watched. Not much in the room, just a few stone columns, a couple of chairs and a few lines drawn on the wall. Not too much light in the room, it took Laura's vampire eyes a minute or so to realise what she was looking at. It was their sign, the one sewn into much of the clothing they wore. Laura climbed down Tim, being very careful where she stood on bits of him. She gave him a long kiss when she was back on her feet.

"It's them.....The Psochic symbol is on one wall." Said Laura.

Would she have discovered it if Tim hadn't been with her ? Laura doubted it, which would have meant no back door in and probably more deaths among David's black ops team.

"Brilliant.....I knew we'd find them." Said Tim.

"I need to show the room to my Gudara." Said Laura. "Ideally I'd like to time how often the guard walks through the room. Can you put up with me on your shoulders for a while ?"

"Yeah.....I'll survive." Said Tim.

Laura summoned her Gudara, who looked around the tunnels, as though it was the most normal place in the world. She was sure if she summoned him to hell, he'd look around as though it was a church jumble sale.

"Beyond this wall is the Psochic base." Said Laura.

"You found them.....Good." Said her Gudara.

No good asking him to take images from her memory, that didn't work. He had to see through her eyes, what Daniel called grabbing images from her visual cortex. Daniel had wanted to do a full investigation on how the Gudara and her managed to link minds, but Laura had never agreed to it. She was worried that too much digging and delving, might stop the magic working. Up again on Tim's shoulders, while her Gudara stood on the ground. Laura concentrated on the room beyond the vent, as though her life depended on it. When she came back with the others, it really might.

"Can you see the room ?"

"Yes." Said her Gudara.

"Could you take me there ?"

He was quiet for a few seconds, which was part of how it all worked. Her Gudara was thinking everything through, before committing himself to an answer.

"Yes, I can." Said her Gudara.

"And bring me back here ?" She asked.

"Yes, Laura.....I'm certain I can."

The guard went through the room again, about twelve minutes since he'd done it before. The time was close, but it was long enough. If the guard saw her, she'd need to get her Gudara to take her back to the Red Rose. Gone would be any surprise by using the back door. Laura climbed down Tim and stood looking at her Gudara. She hugged him, in the sexless way old friends hug.

"Do it.....Take me there....Now." Said Laura.

Sometimes moving a short distance could make her feel dizzy, she had no idea why. Closing her eyes helped, so she closed them until she felt the ground change below her feet. They were there, the room she seemed to have been watching for hours, for far too long. There was a smell of incense coming from somewhere. Those who lived there probably didn't like the stale smells of the tunnels. Laura's Gudara moved a few steps, before holding her arm.

"Laura....." He whispered.

It couldn't be seen from the vent, it was on the opposite wall from the fairly simple emblem of the Psochic order. An empty fireplace was the main feature of the wall; it looked to have been cold and unused for a very long time. Above the fireplace was the emblem of the Psochics. This version was in what looked like gold leaf, over a black background.

"Take me back to Tim." Laura whispered.

Back to Tim, who was eager to know what she'd found. After that all three of them returned to the Red Rose. Others needed to know that she'd found a way into the Psochic base. They had the back door they'd been hoping to find.

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In truth, Clara had always known there was something a bit iffy about Rory. Being fair though, Cyril wasn't running a legit corporation, or a nice warm and fuzzy charity. Cyril ran a criminal empire and employed a lot of potentially iffy people. If they weren't iffy, they'd be working somewhere else. Clara accepted that she was hardly what most would consider to be a model employee. Cyril demanded loyalty and Rory being a mole for the Kosovans was a long way from being loyal. She'd been to see Cyril the night before.

"Are you a hundred percent sure ?" Cyril had asked her.

Rory was a good manager for the Luna Blue, probably the best who'd ever occupied the manager's desk. Cyril wouldn't want to lose him because of gossip and circumstantial evidence.

"Not quite.....I will be certain when I talk to him." Said Clara.

Cyril H Carter had given her permission to kill Rory. It was to be very low key though; nothing conspicuously violent that might disturb the equilibrium of the Luna Blue. Cyril's words, which meant Rory, had to vanish and never be seen again. Clara would see Rory on her own and.....She was getting good at disposing of bodies. Once Simon had been the expert, but Clara was learning all the time. Ronnie and Niña had to know she might not be home until dawn. Between them, they not only organised the domestic life of the house, they made sure her son was always safe and protected.

"Are you going to see Noah ?" Niña had asked.

They were alone in the room under the stairs. Clara felt there was enough privacy to be honest.

"Yes, but mainly.....Tonight I'll deal with Rory." Clara had said.

"Good."

Noah had been fully awake and talkative, which had left Clara in a good mood. Not that her being in a good mood would mean mercy for Rory. Everyone who'd been on the raid in Colindale, thought Rory was guilty; that proof was an unnecessary formality. Clara needed to hear Rory admit his guilt and admit it without her beating it out of him. The last part might prove tricky.

"Nice place, Rory." She muttered. "I hope you're alone tonight."

The North London flat wasn't that expensive looking, but Cyril was tough on conspicuous spending. Rory couldn't live in a mansion, on the salary he was supposed to earn as manager of the Luna Blue. His company car could be quite nice, but it could never be a Rolls Royce. Have a flashy lifestyle and one day, the police would ask how you could afford it. While Clara stood in the garden, looking up at Rory's large two bed flat, a light went on in what was probably the bathroom.

"How was I so wrong about you, Rory ?" Clara muttered.

At one time she'd thought about Rory being relationship material. Not that it was first time she'd been fooled by charm and a pretty face. There had been a senior MP once, who'd betrayed her. His death had been low key too; the police had never found his body. Clara checked her watch and it was five minutes past midnight. People would still be up and watching TV, but the world always felt darker after midnight.

"Let's get it done." She mumbled.

A communal outside door, there were three flats in the converted Victorian building. Like all communal doors, the main lock was old and easy to push open; especially if you were a vampire. The two deadlocks hadn't been used and probably never were. Similarly the two bolts inside the door, hadn't been pushed home. That kind of security slowed people down, when they were off out to the pub, or going for a Thai takeaway. Clara was hardly breathing, as she silently went up the main stairs to Rory's flat. There were keys to Rory's place in the office at the Luna Blue, but they were years out of date. Rory had made a thing about putting in a super new electronic security system. A friend of Ronnie's had supplied a scrambler for the clever system. Not that they'd known the intended target. Clara leant against the door and picked up two heartbeats. Damn, Rory had company. There were two voices, one of them female. The woman was shouting for a drink, while she finished bathing. Clara used the scrambler, which was a kind of EMF device. One press of a button and all three flats in the building, were plunged into darkness.

"Wow, I can see me using you again." Clara muttered.

She was wearing a hoody and rubber gloves. No matter what might happen in Rory's home, Clara was determined to leave no fingerprints. Her forensic footprint was hard to pin down, she already knew that. Hardly surprising that the police weren't geared up to identify vampire samples. Clara pushed the flat door and it opened.

"Rory.....What the fuck !" A woman shouted. "I'm up to my neck in hot water and pow.....No lights."

"Had that before.....It'll come back on fairly soon, usually does." Yelled Rory.

"Bring me a flashlight.....Or I'll break my neck in here." Shouted the woman.

Clara had walked the length of the flat and was opening the bathroom door by then. Not locked or bolted of course, who bolts a bathroom door when it's just them and a partner in the flat ? The lampposts in the street were still on, giving Clara more than enough light to see by, or at least not bump into anything.

"You were quick." Said the woman. "Stop messing about and give me some light."

Clara did feel some normal human emotions, but she could drive them away from her mind and ignore them. She assumed all vampires had the same ability. The woman was merely an annoyance to her, another body to be disposed of. Before the woman could realise she wasn't Rory with a flashlight, Clara had snapped her neck. A dreadful waste of good blood, but Clara wasn't there to feed. Rory arrived with a flashlight, but he didn't attempt to run away.

"Crap.....You didn't have to kill Debbie." Said Rory.

"I did.....You know I couldn't leave her alive." Said Clara.

"I knew you'd come." Said Rory. "When I heard Noah had been hurt and you lived.....I knew you'd come for me."

No guns, no shouted threats.....Rory sat on the edge of the bath and stroked Debbie's wet hair. Had he genuinely cared for her ? It seemed as though he had.

"Noah will be fine.....He's already much better." Said Clara.

"Good.....It was never intended to be like that." Said Rory. "Paying me for information was one thing, but it was never supposed to be like that."

Any jury would call it a confession, but it was Rory sat there. Up until Colindale, she'd have called him a friend, a really good friend. He had to admit it, with no wriggle room.

"Are you talking about Colindale ?" Clara asked.

"Of course I am." Said Rory. "Not the first time I'd taken money from them, but no one mentioned a trap. It wasn't supposed to go down like that.....A total fucking mess."

"How long have you worked for the Kosovans ?" Asked Clara.

"Hmmmm most of the bosses are Serbs." Said Rory. "I was approached after you and I were shot at in the Luna Blue car park. Work with us.....You get paid and it's better than being shot at. I tended to agree with them. Plus.....At the time the money was useful."

That was good enough a confession to convince any cop Clara had ever met. She could go to Cyril and tell him there was no doubt about Rory's guilt. Clara pulled the plug from the bath. A dry Debbie would be far easier to move than a wet Debbie. She then sat next to Rory, on the edge of the bath.

"You could have come to me.....We'd have sorted something out." Said Clara.

"You're right, I should have, Clara.....But I didn't." Said Rory.

When it came to it and her arm went around his neck, Rory resisted. Of course he did, everyone resists when the moment arrives. He was a strong guy with tough neck muscles. He tried to break free of her grip, but she was stronger than him. After choking him out, she twisted his neck until she heard a snapping sound. Rory's dead body twitched in her arms for a few seconds.

"I'm sorry.....Cyril would have had you tortured." Muttered Clara.

Another waste of at least twelve pints of good blood and Clara hated waste. The tech guy who'd sold her the scrambler had mentioned that there was no time limit for the lights coming on again in the flat. Once screwed up, the electrics remained screwed up. A skilled electrician would need to change a lot of expensive components, to get the building's supply reconnected. The neighbours had to be

wondering 'why them,' Clara knew she'd be wondering. She just hoped none of them decided to come and talk to Rory about it. No, the guy was famous for being generally moody and taciturn. But, there will still two bodies to be removed from a first floor flat. Debbie looked quite slender, but Rory was a big guy and nearly all of it was muscle. Clara needed the help of someone strong and used to dealing with human remains. Most of the other vampires were either in Jerusalem, or about to go there. Clara had a bit of a brainwave, or maybe it was just desperation. She called Liz Grant, hoping that she was at home and feeling in the mood for a small and illegal adventure.

"Liz, it's Clara.....I need a hand with something, a bit of a problem." Said Clara. "Are you free tonight?"

"What kind of problem?" Asked Liz.

"Two sick relatives, really sick people." Said Clara. "One I can move on my own, but two of them.....I really need help.....And a van, I know Brendan has a van."

"How sick are these relatives?" Asked Liz.

"As sick as it's possible to get."

Liz would know what she meant. Clara had talked openly on mobile phones, until Hacker Jim had told her the encryption wasn't, his words, worth shit. Now she tried to avoid directly admitting to murder and disposing of her victims. It was worrying; Liz hadn't said anything for a while.

"I can bring the van, but Brendan won't get involved." Said Liz.

"Yes, I understand.....I really wanted you." Said Clara. "You're actually stronger than I am."

"I assume the sick people are in London, or inside the M25?" Asked Liz.

"Yes, we're all in North London." Said Clara. "I'll text you an address."

It took a minute, or so, for Liz to say anything again. She'd always used quiet moments to look things up, or decided if she really wanted to become involved in someone else's crap.

"Ok, I have your location.....I can be there in about forty minutes." Said Liz.

"Thanks, Liz.....I won't forget this." Said Clara.

"Oh, don't worry.....I'll never let you forget it."

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David Huynh knew it was his show. Nathalie had told everyone involved in the destruction of the Psochic order, that it was his show. There could only be one leader. Anything else caused confusion and confusion meant carrying home more friends in body bags. Everyone knew it; Nathalie had personally explained it to the more volatile, like Laura and old Thomas.

"David's team, he's in charge." Nathalie had told them. "Obey his orders as though they're mine."

David had been away from the Silver Dawn for a while, working for the NSA and doing a little freelance work. People tend to like a team leader they know and trust and David hadn't taken a Silver Dawn team into battle since.....It had been quite a while. Despite his worries, everyone seemed to be accepting the chain of command.....

"Everyone is training hard.....We could attack tonight." Said Laura.

They had a back door into the Psochic base thanks to Laura. She'd have happily attacked the base immediately, but David had other people to consider. Clara was due to arrive that night, bringing Daniel with her. Not only big hitters, they both knew the Psochics and how they were likely to have set up their defences.

"I tend to agree.....Tonight would be good." Said Thomas. "Only if Clara has arrived of course, we need Clara for the attack."

"The longer we train and wait." Said Amir. "The more likely it is that someone will recognise one of us. The Psochics aren't stupid. We need the advantage of surprise."

David knew that some Shamans were better than others. He'd had arguments with Amir in the past, but he was just about the best the Silver Dawn had. He was a Seer too, able to see the future sometimes, with far more clarity than most. Like all Shamanic skills, his ability as a Seer wasn't guaranteed to be perfect on the night. With his long dark beard and rather fierce features, Amir was good in a battle too, especially if he got a chance to use a blade.

"Clara is booked on a flight due to arrive this afternoon." Said Tim. "Travelling under a false name of course."

Everyone was in the deepest part of the Red Rose, where all the weapons were stored. Most training took place there too. There was space to spar and a soundproof firing range. Only twenty five yards long, but for most battles, that was about the range you were likely to be firing from. Often you'd be closer, much closer. Meetings tended to be held while clustered around the mats where martial arts training was going on. David liked the Red Rose, but there was a very real risk of being seen by their enemies. It was after all, a popular and well known restaurant.

"Clara will need time to get up to speed." Said Thomas.

"No.....She's famous for landing on her feet and running." Said Laura. "It's David's decision of course.....Do we attack when Clara arrives, David?"

Everyone will always say an extra day getting acclimatised helps in Jerusalem. It was hot and sticky, especially in the tunnels. Wait too long and people lost their edge though, David had seen it happen. On the other hand, a lack of proper preparation can be fatal. David realised his mind was trying to hold two opposing views and accepted that. There was no real right answer, it all boiled down to a gut feeling. Actually it all came down to whether Clara arrived on the afternoon flight she was booked on.

"She's booked at The American Colony Hotel, I checked." Said Nathalie's new PA. "She always stays there.....A bit expensive, but Clara has a thing about palm trees.....According to Nathalie."

The new PA was Genevieve, though everyone called her Gen. David had found out her name, after running into her quite a few times. It seemed she'd volunteered for Jerusalem. That alone had earned her quite a lot of respect.

"No watching the hotel, the Psochics may pick that up." Said David. "If Clara arrived at the Red Rose by this evening.....We'll attack the Psochics tonight."

"That's what I like to hear." Said Laura.

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Ideally, Daniel would never fly anywhere, ever. He hated the short hops to get from London to Aberdeen. But those had become unavoidable. The mere thought of flying to Jerusalem had given him a nervous stomach and a definite case of the jitters. He was Isaac Laquedem though, the wandering Jew. He'd already lived longer than just about anyone else was ever likely to live. He wasn't afraid of dying in a plane crash, it was the lack of control that bothered him. If he'd had the money, he'd have learned to fly and bought his own Gulf Stream private jet. Flying himself would be perfect, but he was never going to be that wealthy, or that self-indulgent.....

"Immigration seemed to be having a quiet day." Said Clara. "It usually takes a while.....We're early and can probably get a meal at the hotel this evening."

"Didn't David ask us to go straight to the Red Rose?" Asked Daniel.

They'd hired a car, it seemed better than constantly using taxis. A car that was theirs for the duration of their stay, made more sense. Plus, the airport for Jerusalem was a long way from the city. It was a fairly new hire car and the air conditioning worked perfectly. Clara had mentioned looking forward to doing a little tourism, before they headed for home.

"Yes, he did.....We'll quickly book into the Colony and then go to see David." Said Clara.

Daniel found it always happened when he was in the Middle East, which he tried to avoid. That was the problem with a very long life; even rare events began to stack up. Maybe it was the heat, or the sand, or even hearing Arabic being spoken at the airport. For whatever reason, he experienced déjà vu in a very extreme way. Flashbacks really, like waking lucid dreams. He could snap out of them and they didn't last long, but they were always disturbing. It was all those millennia of course, wandering around while looking for a solution to what he was and why he existed.

"Are you alright, Daniel?" Asked Clara. "I know this part of the world can affect you."

"And it always will.....I still have no idea what I am, or why I exist." Said Daniel "I saw at least a dozen Bedouins walk across the road, complete with their camels. All an hallucination of course.....It passes quickly though. Delusional Bedouins and their livestock, won't make me a risk during the attack."

"I've doubted a few people, but never you, Daniel." Said Clara. "I have confidence in you for when things turn nasty. As for the not knowing why you're here....That just makes you the same as the other eight billion people who inhabit this world. Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? I doubt if even the ancient Gods of Egypt knew the answers.....Be gentle with yourself, Daniel."

It was why he'd stopped driving anywhere even remotely near the cities of the old world. Jerusalem was the worst, but anywhere in Israel could set it off. Some places in Syria too and Lebanon was quite bad. He'd spent thousands of year wandering in those areas.....It was bound to have an effect. He dreamt of an ancient God finally turning up to tell him what it had all been for. He wasn't the only wanderer with an unnaturally prolonged life. Not that knowing that helped.

"Soon we can shower, swim in the pool and enjoy a long island iced tea." Said Clara.

Clara was like a daughter to him, a five hundred and twenty something, years old daughter. She had a wild streak, which included getting drunk in exotic places and enjoying room service in five star hotels. Daniel knew even just being along for the ride, was going to be amazing. They were booking in at the Colony, when Clara recognised a woman. A woman in a full veil, with her back to them, but Clara knew who it was.....

"Laura.....Are you stalking us?" Asked Clara.

"Not really.....David mentioned me doing my best not to be recognised." Said Laura.

"We have our room cards.....Come and explain while I shower." Said Clara.

"I want to hear it too." Said Daniel.

"Don't be a baby, Daniel." Said Clara. "Stand outside the bathroom if my naked flesh bothers you that much."

Tim was there too, waiting near the reception desk. No disguise for him, just a top with a hoody.

Clara muttered while she walked, about the number of times Daniel seen her naked. Medical nakedness was different to normal nakedness though, everyone knew that. The Colony had got the service thing just right. Clara's bags were already in her suite, when they arrived. Daniel assumed his bags would be in his suite, when he eventually got there.

"I'm stripping off and getting wet." Said Clara. "Anyone likely to be offended, can wait in the lounge."

"Err.....Am I allowed to....." Began Tim.

"Yes, just don't drool." Said Laura.

As Clara got under a shower of hot water, Daniel found himself a drink; it was beginning to sound like a day when a tumbler full of Jack Daniels was essential. By the time he was back in the bathroom, Laura had to start again from the beginning.

"As I was telling Clara." Said Laura. "We've a back door into the Psochic base. David wants to attack them tonight. You're needed at the Red Rose.....The attack can't start until you're both there."

"It would be nice to eat here, Laura." Said Clara. "Can we order room service and go with you after that ?"

"The Red Rose is a famous restaurant." Said Tim. "The best food I've ever tasted in my entire life. Why not eat there ?"

"There are final preparations, Clara." Said Laura. "They won't begin those until everyone is there. You're both urgently needed.....I'll even add another urgently."

Daniel had heard enough and it had crossed his mind, that Clara was playing a bit of a game with Laura. Sometimes that was fun, but not when the lives of friends, might depend on it.

"Don't make the poor girl beg, Clara." Said Daniel. "Get out of the shower and get dressed. It's obvious that we need to go and see David.....And that we need to go right now."

"Oh, Daniel.....You used to be more fun." Said Clara. "Alright, we'll go now.....But someone needs to pass me a towel."

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