

Clara Copley

(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 6 – Old Thomas

“Niña had her own bank account now and her very own plastic cards. All of it arranged through Cyril and his small army of assorted crooks, solicitors and accountants.”

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Laura had called David Huynh and he'd been happy to join her team, at least for a while. The NSA were, according to him, the worst mindless bureaucracy on the planet. He was constantly bored, yet seemed to be addicted to the organisation. Similarly they seemed addicted to him and no matter how many times he stormed out of the building, they still took him back.

“I'm hoping working for you for a while, might break the addiction.” He'd told her.

David wasn't going to be with her for the book collection from old Thomas, he had a few things to finish off for the NSA. It seemed David wanted to go through the whole resign and tidy up process.

“If I do it properly, I might be less inclined to go back.” He'd said.

David was tough and clever, so Laura was happy to get him for the eventual assault on the headquarters of the Psochics. According to Nathalie and her usually reliable data archives, the Psochic order were definitely still calling Jerusalem their home. David had given her a little information for free, which was always suspect. Too good to be true was often not true and potentially dangerous.

“I looked him up and old Thomas has been looked over by the NSA.” David had told her. “Nothing that serious, no major investigation. Just a fairly quick and routine look over. There were rumours about him selling data from the archives of the Silver Dawn. There is an address though, an address that just might be where he's gone to ground.”

Too damn good to be true of course. Just when Laura would have sold a kidney to get a solid lead on old Thomas, David hands her one.....Free of charge. It shrieked set up at her, but David had nothing to gain by sending her into a trap. She'd thanked David and used Google to look up Rue Colbert in Amiens, France. It looked very rural in that part of Amiens and the address was a unit in a fairly tatty looking industrial estate. Not the kind of place old Thomas would be seen dead, which made it the perfect place for him to hide. She threw a pen at Tim, who was sat in an armchair and actually snoring. The love of her life could sleep anywhere, but a biro hitting his shirt woke him up.

“Found him.....I have an address for old Thomas.” Said Laura.

“How old is old Tomas ?” Asked Tim.

“I'm not certain, but he fought in the Spanish civil war.....Which gives you an idea of his age.”

“He can't be that old.....No one is that old.” Said Tim.

“Silver Dawn archivists are a strange breed.” Said Laura. “They have access to forbidden occult knowledge and they seem to have no fear of using it. Thomas may have reached a truly staggering age.”

“How are we getting there ?” Asked Tim.

“Hmmmmm drive there I think, about a six hour drive from Brittany.” Said Laura. “We can take a car full of equipment and give Rue Colbert a thorough examination. Once there, I can summon my Gudara, if we need him.”

"Did you ever give your Gudara a proper name?" Asked Tim.

"I tried, but it just confused him.....You're still in that chair, Tim. Get busy, we need to saddle up and be on our way."

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Niña had a full driving license, in the name of Niña Copley. A driving license acquired for her by one of Clara's underworld contacts; one of her criminal friends. It might have been Noah; he'd given her the licence and a passport, which had really excited her. Niña had looked passports up on the internet and discovered it opened up the world for her. A valid passport could take her anywhere, apart from a tiny number of countries she had no wish to visit.

"Keep taking the driving lessons." Noah had said. "I know you can drive alright, but you still need to be better at it."

Clara was paying for the lessons with a driving school Ronnie had recommended. Niña had her own bank account now and her very own plastic cards. All of it arranged through Cyril and his small army of assorted crooks, solicitors and accountants. Clara seemed to view driving lessons as a necessary part of Niña's education and she was happy to pay for them. Niña thought she could drive pretty well, definitely better than a lot of those she saw using the supermarket car park. She parked Clara's Peugeot perfectly, right between the lines of the Morrisons parking bay. She sighed as the woman with two kids in her car, parked across a set of lines.

"They can't even park properly." Muttered Niña.

"They do say.....The only time anyone drives well, is when they're learning." Said Ronnie.

Niña could carry the shopping with no problem and she'd mastered the bits of plastic, though she preferred swiping to pin numbers. Ronnie was there for company really, a kindred spirit among a superstore full of strangers. It helped Ronnie too, who was still mourning poor Hacker Jim. Simon had once told Niña that the main secret to life, was keeping busy. Now it seemed a reasonable thing to say and definitely not a joke.

"We need nappies today.....Lots of nappies." Said Niña.

"Nappies are always item one on the list." Said Ronnie.

The pile against the wall in the room under the stairs was still huge, but smaller than it had been. Niña was determined that when Clara went to get a new pack of nappies, there were always plenty there.

"Might be a problem, do you know her?" Asked Ronnie. "Woman in front of us.....Yellow dress."

Niña had seen the look before; all vampires had seen the look a few times. For Niña it had been when going to church one Sunday morning in Florence. Clara had told her about Simon once being hugged by an old black woman, who was a total stranger. He'd been travelling by train on something called the North London Line. Niña like trains and hoped to one day, travel on the Northern London Line from one end to the other.

"If you meet someone who can see you, I mean really see you." Clara had told her. "Always be polite and never, ever get angry. Say something you feel is appropriate and smile. You never want to cause a scene.....That might get the attention of the Van Helsings."

Clara told her about a woman who could see her, while Clara was shopping for lingerie in Oxford Street in Central London. It seemed that Lingerie was a fancy word for underwear. Once Clara had seen the look on the woman's face, she'd lost herself among the crowds.

"It's rare and not only women can see us." Clara had said. "Laura had a young man stare at her.....According to Laura, he was terrified."

Elderly or young, female or male, it was rare and seemed to cover all races. Simon's black woman was quite old and she'd actually hugged him on a crowded train. He'd hugged her back and from what she'd said to him, she'd mistaken him for the angel of death, come to take her on the final journey. Clara viewed that as the woman seeing Simon as something very dark and associated with death. The idea of a vampire, never seemed to occur to those who really saw them.

"Not surprising really.....Immortals with a dark aura, reputedly the Devil's favourite children. Not surprising that if they can see us.....We're seen as the angel of death." Clara had said.

The woman had hugged Simon for three stops and Simon had hugged her back. He'd whispered to her, saying that she could relax; he hadn't come to claim her soul. It seemed she'd been smiling when she'd left the train at somewhere called Brondesbury Park. As fate seemed to have left Niña in the twenty first century, she hoped to one day visit Brondesbury Park Station. All the places visited by Simon, now almost felt like sacred ground.

"Don't worry; I've seen that look before." Niña said to Ronnie.

Clara had told her to be polite, to be nice. No looking like a threat, no anger. Niña wasn't into the trend of being kind, which was a huge thing on social media. She was kind to people she liked, but she hadn't found that many people she genuinely liked. Keeping the old lady in the yellow dress calm..... Niña could see the point of that.

"Hello." Said Niña.

It might easily have gone horribly wrong. Simon had hugged the woman on the North London Line, so she hugged the scared looking woman in a yellow dress. She might have screamed, she might even have had some kind of seizure. Luckily the woman hugged her back. Constantly running through Niña's head, were Clara's instructions to be nice, polite and non-threatening.

"Have you come for me ?" Asked the woman. "I haven't been feeling well."

"No, I'm not here for you." Said Niña.

She smiled, the woman who hadn't been well, smiled at her. Niña had no idea when death might visit the woman, it might be that night. It wasn't that she was lying, not really. With luck, the woman would have a while longer in the land of the living. Ronnie broke the moment, which was probably a good thing.

"Nappies.....We must get nappies." Said Ronnie.

"Yes.....Of course." Said Niña.

As she entered the store, Niña could still see the woman looking at her. Not that it was a problem. She was hardly going to call the police, to report the angel of death entering the Morrisons at Palmers Green.

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Clara had been through it all before, though this time would be different. In some key way, it was always different. The last major attack on a rival criminal empire, had been with Laura and Simon. This time she'd be accompanied by Mabina and Daniel. Three vampires last time and three vampires this time, but it would be different. In theory the three of them could take out a small army of humans, no matter how well they were armed. In practise, there was no way of knowing how things would go wrong on the night; there never was a way of knowing. Things would go wrong though, that was guaranteed. Clara was sat in Noah's car, while both of them looked over the building where the Kosovans had their synthetic drugs laboratory.

"I just needed to do a little reconnaissance." Said Clara. "Doorways in, exits out.....That kind of thing."

Cyril had been right, the rival gang had moved in quite close to where Cyril had set up his own base in Wembley. The Serbian-Kosovan gang were just off the A5 in Colindale. Not a bad area, which was unusual. Drug labs seemed to favour being in quite neglected areas, with little footfall at night. Cheap rents too, for fairly derelict old buildings. The one Clara was looking at had once been a shoe factory, according to the file Cyril had given her. The old shoe factory still looked in pretty good shape, compared to the last lab she'd raided with Simon and Laura. Clara looked through Cyril's file. "Ahhhh, they bought the place." Said Clara. "Unusual, these types of places are usually rented for a year or so, before being abandoned. Our Kosovan friends obviously intend to be here for a while." "How many drug cartels have you raided?" Asked Noah.

"Hmm.....There were the Colombians and the Koreans." Muttered Clara. "There was also once a rival London mob, until we paid them a visit one night. This will be the fourth time and being honest.....Experience never makes it any easier."

Niña was going to remain in the Hornsey house to guard the place, while Clara led the attack on the old shoe factory. Liz Grant had finished installing the magical wards around the house. Liz was also going to be there in the house, on the night, along with the Bringer of Fire. The house had never been that well-guarded and Clara was sure her son would be safe.

"Any hints for me.....For the big night?" Asked Noah.

"Don't get killed.....Seriously, Noah." Said Clara. "You'll be better armed than the cartel guys and have far better tech. Let the tech do the work, and.....Keep your head down."

"By my reckoning we're still outnumbered." Said Noah.

"Daniel is a beast when he fights, but wait until you see Mabina in action." Said Clara. "She has no fear at all, no fear of anything and she's totally merciless. Patsy will be driving us on the night and she's not exactly harmless. We'll do alright.....Just remember to duck if anyone shoots at you."

"Will Ronnie be joining us?" Asked Noah.

"No....I want her at the house, sat next to Justin; with a shotgun in her hands." Said Clara.

In truth, Ronnie had still seemed a bit shell shocked from Jim being killed, but there was no need for anyone else to know that. Ronnie Neophytou was sort of, on light duties for a while. The supermarket with Niña and pottering about the house for a couple of weeks and Ronnie would be fine.

"How do we get in there?" Asked Noah. "There's an alarm box, but that doesn't mean they have an alarm."

"The box hasn't worked for a while; it's all in the file." Said Clara. "Cartels tend to not want the police turning up, if the alarm goes off. We go in through a loading hatch at the rear. Tomorrow we'll go through the file with everyone....Until we all know it by heart."

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Amiens wasn't that far from the coast in Northern France. While Clara looked over the old shoe factory, Laura was preparing to recover the book old Thomas had purloined from the forbidden archives of the Silver Dawn. At one time the clocks in Amiens gave the same hour as the clocks in Britain. Now France was always one hour ahead.

"Weird building.....Looks like a mansion, hidden behind a high wall." Said Tim.

"Vines too, flowering vines on every wall of the mansion." Said Laura. "A cynic might think the pretty vines, are there to hide the building."

The building looked alright, but the walls around it were bare bricks, old and grubby red bricks. The walls fitted the rest of the street, but the building didn't.

"I bet when we get in there, the building is palatial." Said Tim.

"I'm not taking that bet; you're probably right." Said Laura.

Old Thomas was said to have inherited a family fortune. He'd also been around for quite a while; long enough to get his mansion the way he liked it. To the casual observer, it was just another grubby set of walls in an industrial estate. To anyone willing to look properly, it told another story. There was money there and a building probably quite opulent inside and as Tim had said, palatial. "The wisteria is flowering out of season." Muttered Tim. "I've always had a thing about wisteria." "Thomas is an occultist and an archivist of arcane knowledge." Said Laura. "He could probably grow oranges in Northern France in the winter."

"So.....Are we going over the wall tonight ?" Asked Tim.

Were they ? Laura had a gut feeling and Simon had always told her to listen to her gut feelings. The problem was that her gut was often totally wrong. Her gut had led her into some very nasty situations. On the other hand, it was right more often than it was wrong. She had a feeling about the gate in the wall and the time of day.

"We'll attack now, Thomas won't be expecting it." Said Laura. "The gate won't be locked during the day; I have a feeling about it. The postman, deliveries.....Total security will begin at the door to get into the house."

"And if the gate is locked ?" Asked Tim.

"We go away and think of a better plan." Said Laura. "It will be open; my gut is yelling that at me.....The gate will be unlocked. You drive, while I open the gate. You drive inside and there will be a parking area. Park up as though you're just another delivery guy."

"And after I'm parked up.....What then ?" Asked Tim.

"We attack the house.....Find the book and leave as quickly as we can." Said Laura. "I can't see the French Gendarmerie hurtling this way to look into reported gunfire in Rue Colbert, but you never know. We need to get the book and be gone, as quickly as possible."

"That's the plan ?" Asked Tim.

"Yes, do you think it's alright ?" Asked Laura.

"Compared to some of our plans.....It sounds well thought out."

He was being sarcastic of course, but she still gave him a long kiss on the lips.

"Alright, get in the driver's seat." Said Laura. "Once in there, park up slowly.....No rush, you're here to deliver something quite mundane.....Got it ?"

"I get it.....Let's do this." Said Tim.

"Grab your weapon of choice and put on a Kevlar vest." Said Laura.

Once Tim was as bullet proof as he was likely to be and had an assault rifle next to him; Laura tried the set of gates. As she'd hoped, the gates opened inwards and gave access to a small, but very tidy courtyard. She waved Tim in, who parked their car in the gap closest to the gates. The Silver Dawn had loaned her a car, knowing it might never be seen again. A fairly old Citroen, but it was solid and roadworthy. Best of all, it wasn't traceable to anyone connected with the Silver Dawn, or Laura. Once Tim had parked, Laura closed the gate and broke off the clasp and padlock. No one was going to be locking the gate to stop them leaving.

"Over here, there's something I need to do." Said Laura.

Surprisingly quiet in the main house, no one had come to see who'd driven inside. They probably had everything delivered, from groceries to clothing. Laura had seen an open door, leading to what looked like a storeroom. Once inside she realised she'd been right. It was the dry good store for Thomas and his household. Boxes of tinned food were piled against the walls.

"Reminds me of Niña and her room under the stairs." Said Tim.

"It explains why no one comes running when a delivery arrives." Said Laura. "The delivery guys know where everything goes. Now.....Time to summon my Gudara. We have need of him."

Laura sat cross-legged on the floor, in a gap between boxes of tinned tomatoes and bags of basmati rice. How many guards did Thomas have ? The amount of tinned food suggested it was quite a few. Hopefully her Gudara would keep them occupied.

"Come my Gudara.....I have need of you." Laura muttered.

In the early days of calling him, it could take a dozen repetitions, but now he came straight away. No longer naked, her muse and protector was now dressed in the largest track suit Laura could find online. Similarly, finding him shoes had been an effort. He was wearing a huge pair of trainers she'd discovered on Ebay. Not that her Gudara cared where his clothes came from. He touched her arm and Laura leant forward and kissed his cheek.

"We discussed this.....You know what must be done." Said Laura.

"I keep them busy." Said her Gudara. "I may kill anyone who attacks me, but never Thomas. I remember the picture you showed me of Old Thomas. He alone must be undamaged."

"Undamaged.....I like that." Said Tim.

Her Gudara liked Tim. He made his happy sound at the back of his throat and attempted a smile. His smiles looked quite scary, if he tried to show his teeth.

"That's it.....Go now, keep them busy." Said Laura.

Once she'd sent him to create mayhem the clock was ticking. The police might not arrive fast, but someone in another building would call them and eventually, they would turn up. It would mean leaving, maybe without the precious book. Laura had learned her lesson and would never attack the French Van Helsings. Within two minutes there was the sound of gunfire from somewhere above them. It was followed by the roar of her Gudara and the screams of a human in pain.

"Here we go.....Time for us to begin searching." Said Laura.

"Why are you so keen on not harming Thomas ?" Asked Tim.

"A gut feeling.....Yes, another one of those." Said Laura. "I feel he might be more useful alive, than he would be dead.....And I quite like the crazy old guy."

"A good enough reason." Said Tim.

Easy to get into the dry good store, the door had been open. Someone had decided that delivery guys could get into the store, but no further. The door which probably gave access to the rest of Thomas's mansion, was solid and didn't even rattle when Laura pushed it. It was a wooden door though and as Simon had taught her.

"To a vampire, a wooden door isn't a proper door.....Not a serious door." Simon had told her.

There had been an old oak door once; a good six inches thick, with several good quality locks. Laura had broken it open, but that had tested Simon's opinion on wooden doors.

"Can you get us past it ?" Asked Tim.

"This door will be easy-peasy." Said Laura.

No barging with her shoulder, that only worked in TV cop shows. Try it in real life and you were likely to end up in hospital, with a dislocated shoulder, or worse. Laura didn't even take a run up; she kicked the door when stood in front of it. Vampires had tougher bones than humans, a lot tougher. Her connective tissues were better too, so no worries about torn ligaments. As for strength.....There was no definitive amount vampires were stronger than humans, it depended on the vampire and the human being used as a comparison. Laura thought she was at least fifteen times stronger than a young, fit and muscular human male. She kicked the door with the sole of her boot. There was a lot

of noise and the door went backwards a little, but it hadn't opened. What looked like plaster, fell from the doorframe, which was encouraging.

"One more and it'll go." Encouraged Tim.

On the second kick the door remained solid, its locks still firmly locked. It was the frame which came away from the wall, with a shower of plaster. Probably a new door and whoever had built it, hadn't thought the frame needed reinforcing. The door was on the ground, leaving Laura with a view of a short corridor, with a set of stairs at the end.

"We're in.....Check every target, Tim." Said Laura. "My Gudara is up there somewhere and I'd quite like to keep old Thomas alive, at least for now."

"I'll be careful." Said Tim.

No details of the inevitable battle, had been talked about in the fairly broad brush stroke planning. At the top of the stairs, Laura turned left, while Tim carried straight on. The idea was that they could cause more general chaos by splitting up. Laura knew the sound of Tim's preferred make of assault rifle. She heard him firing at someone, which gave her a pretty good idea of his location.

"Just stay alive." Laura muttered.

Laura wasn't against using firearms herself, but they did announce where you were to the entire world. Laura had a blade tucked down her belt and of course, she had her fangs. One scratch from those and most humans were either unconscious for a while, or suffering from a brain fog that lasted for hours. Strangulation was a possibility too of course, but it was slow and often quite noisy.

"Thomas.....Come out, come out, wherever you are." Shouted Laura.

There was a large desk in the room she was in, a very solid looking hardwood desk. Laura crouched behind it and waited to see if any of the guards came to see who was taunting their master. They should after all; it was what Thomas was paying them for.

"Azrael here, I'm in room JH4.....She shouted and ran." The guard spoke into a radio.

Naming themselves after angels, that suggested a massive ego somewhere in the chain of command. As for her running.....Laura could move incredibly fast and without causing that much of a sound.

The guard had it all, from what looked like full body Kevlar, to an assault rifle in his hands, with another over his shoulder. He had what looked like night vision glasses, but wasn't currently using them. Technology kept evolving. One day she'd meet a guard in power armour, just like in a Sci-Fi movie. Laura had the guard in a vicelike grip, before he was aware she was there.

"For the record.....I never yell and run away." Laura muttered.

She pushed her blade under the back of his helmet and pushed hard. Not exactly her first time, but taking out soldiers in combat clothing, wasn't an everyday event. Her blade hit his neck vertebra and glanced off. Laura knew how to hold the guard and where to aim her blade. By the time her knife appeared again, it was tearing out most of the guard's throat. His blood splattered her face as he fell, with a few drops going in her mouth. That meant she now had a hunger for more human blood, a lot of human blood.

"Damn pest.....I'll have a headache until I feed." She muttered at the dead guard.

No feeding on him, but she would need to feed before they left Thomas's mansion. Otherwise the headache would build into an agonising migraine. Pick up the guard's dropped assault rifle ?

Tempting, but even hung over her shoulder, it had the potential to slow her down and make a noise. Laura left the dead guard with his weapon and his expensive night vision goggles. Laura left study room JH4, by the door at the far end, which wasn't locked. No one there, but she heard Tim's assault rifle firing, somewhere above her. Another floor and the mansion looked to have four floors from the outside. Just clearing every room might take hours and that was without searching for the stolen

book. Her ability to sense humans was playing up; the mansion was probably full of magical wards. She had a feeling about the corridor though and so far that day, her feelings had been reliable. Laura very carefully opened a door and silently stepped out into a long corridor. There was an old fashioned armoire, which she used to hide her from another guard. A woman this time, who seemed pretty pissed off with someone.

"I don't care if one is a vampire.....Shoot her and she'll bleed." Said the guard, into a radio. "Shoot her in the heart and she'll bleed and die.....Do your fucking job."

No angel name over the radio and she seemed like a boss lady for the guards. Mention of a vampire, but no mention of a huge humanoid creature larger than a mountain gorilla. Laura hoped that her Gudara was still alive and fighting. A busy day, the boss lady had another call to answer.

"Yes sir.....Four confirmed dead and one of the attackers would appear to be a chimera of some kind."

Chimera indeed, her Gudara was a pure blood, ancient vampire. Judging by her humility, the boss lady was probably talking to Thomas. Nice to know her Gudara was still in one piece, but Laura had a hunger to satisfy. She stepped out from where the armoire was hiding her, loving the surprised look on the guard's face.

"Tell me where he hid the book ?" Asked Laura. "Tell me and I'll let you live."

It was actually a relief when the guard went for a handgun in a holster attached to her belt. Probably an old school military background, with training where only officers got a handgun. Laura hadn't wanted to let at least ten pints of delicious blood, leave the building. Laura was already swerving, when the boss lady guard, fired her gun. By then Laura was behind her, pulling her forearm across the guard's throat.

"It's a scroll not a book.....I know where it is."

Too late, Laura's hunger was too strong. It was delivering all that blood to Clara, without tasting any of it herself. Laura could usually control the urge to feed, but not now. Laura easily dragged the guard over the floor, to where a recessed doorway would screen them from the rest of the long corridor. The boss lady struggled, until Laura had driven her fangs into her throat. A fit looking woman, still in her prime.....The blood would taste wonderfully sweet. Still a little movement from the guard, as Laura began drinking from her throat.

"Easy.....Relax, it'll soon be over." Said Laura.

The guard's radio beeped, but it wasn't going to be answered. As Laura drank deeply the blood was delicious, but being honest, all blood was good blood. Vampires didn't have a magic stomach that could take eleven pints of blood. The digestion of all that wonderful blood, began in the mouth, continued in the throat and carried on right down the digestive tract. Laura's body could take in and digest all that hot, delicious blood, in less than ten minutes. No magic involved, just a highly evolved digestive system. Her Gudara appeared, nodded at her and vanished again. More gunfire from above and more screaming from humans. Euphoria was going to be Laura's problem, as she stood up and looked at the dead guard. Feeding that much.....The feeling of Euphoria would slow her reactions and make her less of a perfect killing machine.

"Thank you.....Your blood was.....Perfect." Laura muttered.

The sound of a grenade exploding somewhere above her, meant there was no time to search every inch of the mansion. Tim had a few grenades, but it was likely the guards had some too. The police might not pull out all the stops for reported gunfire, which might turn out to be fireworks. A grenade though, a loud explosion.....They'd be on their way after the first phone call. Laura called her Gudara, who was there in an instant.

"Do you know where Thomas is in the building ?" Asked Laura.

He pointed up at the ceiling in one place, then he pointed at another. Laura changed her mind about the assault rifle; her priorities were changing as information changed. She found it, picked it up and set it to fire on fully automatic.

"Thomas moves around between two places." Said her Gudara.

"Take me to the place you last saw him.....Then go to the other place." Said Laura. "Hold him, but if he hurts you.....You have to hurt him worse. Do you understand ?"

"Yes, I understand."

He held her and took her instantly to the top floor of the mansion. Her Gudara vanished again, leaving her only a few feet from several heavily armed guards.

"Drop your weapon.....Stand still." A guard yelled at her.

"There's no need for all this.....Tell me where the book is ?" Asked Laura.

"It's a scroll, not a book."

Laura knew that, she wasn't a fool and she was getting fed up with people who thought she was. A quick spray of bullets in his face and the guard was a body on the antique looking parquet flooring.

"I know it's a fucking scroll !" Shouted Laura.

All that blood in her system and then finding several guards in one place. Laura knew she was a little out of control, but she loved it. One thing kept filling her mind.....Thomas wasn't there, so he must be where her Gudara was heading.

"Kill her, bring her down." Someone yelled.

In the old time cowboy movies, the hero was always shooting bad guys in the leg. It was a harmless way of taking someone out of the fight, wasn't it ? In truth, Laura knew there were a lot of major arteries in human legs. Plus, few wearing bullet proof vests, used Kevlar leggings. The guards didn't have their assault rifles up and ready to use; they'd probably gone to see old Thomas for fresh orders.

"Whatever Thomas is paying you guys.....It isn't enough." Said Laura.

They were slow and unprepared, while Laura was fast and eager to be done with the guards, Thomas and the mansion. She emptied a full clip into their legs, leaving them writhing in pain on the floor. There was a chance of one of them firing at her, but judging by the amount of screaming, she had nothing to worry about. Tempting to finish them off, but Laura drew the line at shooting crippled opponents in the head. Anyway, by the amount of blood on the floor, the guards wouldn't be in the land of the living for much longer. She knew where her Gudara was going and Laura ran there. One locked door in her way, but it wouldn't have stopped a determined child.

"Laura, he stabbed me.....He won't keep still." Said her Gudara.

As for Tim, the sound of another grenade exploding, told her that her lover was still causing chaos among the remnants of the mansion's guards. Good for Tim...If he survived she'd buy him something expensive as a gift. Her Gudara had Thomas bent over a table, but Thomas wasn't afraid of a fight. Her Gudara had at least two stab wounds in his left arm. Laura pressed her blade against Thomas's throat.

"Stop fighting, Thomas; or I will cut your throat." Said Laura. "I'm sure Nathalie isn't that fussed about getting her book back. Tell me it's a scroll and your next meal will be through a straw. I've had enough of you and your guards. I'll happily kill you and torch this place. Then no one gets the scroll.....Nathalie might even still pay my bonus."

Thomas looked genuinely horrified, that Laura might destroy the mansion and all the priceless objects it contained. He went limp and allowed her Gudara to use cable ties on his wrists.

"You'll get no more trouble from me." Said Thomas.

"Where is it, Thomas ? Where is the book, scroll or whatever you want to call it ?" Asked Laura.

"It's in the cedar wood box on the shelf behind me."

Cedar from somewhere in the Middle East, the scent from the wood was wonderful. Laura opened it and there was the ancient scroll. Too easy ? Thomas didn't want to die and he hated the idea of his home being burned to the ground. Laura trusted the scroll, but not the box. She shoved the scroll into an inside pocket in her jacket.

"Now.....What do we do with you ?" Asked Laura.

Tim chose that moment to enter the room and he was covered from head to foot in blood and pieces of viscera. As he looked fit and well, Laura assumed none of the blood was his.

"Did you get them all ?" Asked Laura.

"I think so, but there were so many and they were so noisy.....I think they're all dead." Said Tim.

Laura turned back to Thomas, with every intention of leaving him as yet another pool of blood on the parquet flooring. He couldn't be trusted, not after stealing from the archives of the Silver Dawn.

"Don't kill me.....I can give you an address for the Psochics in Jerusalem." Said Thomas.

"As if I could trust anything that comes out of your mouth." Said Laura.

"I have a map.....I'll give you the map." Said Thomas.

The map was in a drawer, which Laura wouldn't let him open. There was no gun in there, but Laura wasn't giving Thomas any opportunity to hurt her, or those with her.

"Here, in the old town.....I swear on all I hold dear.....The map is accurate." Said Thomas.

The map looked genuine and the address was in a part of Jerusalem where Nathalie suspected the Psochics had gone to ground.

"I can hear police sirens." Said Tim. "A way off yet, but I can guess where they're heading."

"Alright, you have five minutes to convince me the map is genuine, Thomas." Said Laura.

She'd actually let Tim knock Thomas around a little, he deserved a little fun. Laura was going to put dressings on the knife wounds Thomas had given her Gudara.

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