

Clara Copley

(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 18 – The Beach

“She liked him, despite the file that said he wasn’t quite human; not any more. He was a mercenary who’d once worked for the Psochics, yet she liked him. It was chemistry of course, she realised that. And pheromones of course, everyone blamed inappropriate romantic feelings on pheromones.”

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Tim Chance had hunted for Clara. He’d hunted the young and the old, the healthy and the diseased; the intoxicated and the sober. He knew the vampire saying that all blood was good blood. Simon had once taken him to one side and given him pointers on how to help Laura hunt. The other vampires who visited the Hornsey house, had taught him how best to use a van for the hunt. Long before he was a vampire himself, Tim thought like a vampire and fought like a vampire. Not that he was going to behave like a spoilt know it all. He knew that he still had a lot to learn from Laura.

“You lived and worked in Vienna.” Said Laura. “You must have an idea about the best places to hunt.”

They weren’t that far from the Hotel Imperial, where they’d booked a suite for an indefinite period. Just three blocks east from the hotel, Tim and Laura were stood under a tree in a small park. It was the evening of course; actually just approaching dusk. Dusk, the time of day so loved by thieves and cutthroats. Enough light to see people, but not well enough to recognise them from a mug shot.

“I was a very normal human when I worked in Vienna.” Said Tim. “The only things I ever hunted were cheap booze and sex with the occasional bored divorcee.”

“No being over modest, Tim.” Said Laura. “I know you could write the book on hunting for fresh blood. Tonight we’re just going to.....Polish your skills a little. So, where are we going in this large city ?”

Tim would have liked to give Laura a list, lots of choices of places to polish his skills. There really was only one place though, where a successful hunt was as good as guaranteed.

“The river seems ideal, the mighty Danube.” Said Tim. “Clara once told me she’d hunted more down on the River Thames, than anywhere else in London. All those bars full of intoxicated people. And the river makes an ideal place to dispose of those you’ve fed on. There are green areas next to The Danube as it passes through the city. If I can’t hunt well there.....I deserve to go hungry tonight.”

“Alright, lead on.....You know this city far better than I do.” Said Laura.

Lots of streets with lots of buildings to walk past. Some looked like business premises, while others had the feel of government offices. Occasionally there was a coffee shop, or a place to buy sandwiches. Tim had spent over a year in Vienna, but he still only knew a few of the streets they walked along. The hotel he’d worked at had worked him hard and for weird hours. It was hardly surprising that he was a long way from being an expert on Vienna by night.

“Here.....Here.” He said, while pointing. “These green areas are next to the river for miles.”

Tim’s aim at dusk might have taken them away from where he ideally wanted to be. They were close to a wide section of the park; somewhere with a bandstand type of building. He’d had fun there

once or twice, with a particularly friendly divorcee. Their sex had been boisterous and vocal, but no one had appeared to complain. It was the perfect spot to bring whoever he hunted and caught. "It looks a good place to feed." Said Laura. "Never forget the first rule of making rabbit pie, Tim. First catch your rabbit."

"Hey, I told you that one." Said Tim.

He knew his ideal target to hunt, even if he couldn't tell Laura. She'd go on about feeding patterns and never specialising in a certain type of victim. Tim was quite happy to be more diverse in his feeding habits, as time went on. For that night though he didn't want to hunt anyone female, young, or crippled in some way. Daniel had once told him about his early days as a new vampire.

"I used to wait outside pubs that did after hours business." Daniel had told him. "Drunks mainly, probably spending the rent money on booze. All a fantasy of course, to ease my conscience. I used to search for men who looked like they beat their kids."

Daniel's conscience had largely gone after a few months as a feeder on blood, evaporated was the word Daniel had used. Tim expected to lose his concerns about who he fed on. For that special night though, he was determined to find a middle aged man, who looked intoxicated. If he looked like he beat his kids.....All the better.

"I'm not looking for any particular type." Tim lied. "I'm going to walk through the trees near the river and.....Hopefully someone suitable will turn up."

"Ok, I'll keep well out of your way, but I will be watching." Said Laura. "I'll only step in if you look to be in danger."

They kissed and then Tim was away, heading towards the Danube. His battle skills seemed to be triggered by his unconscious mind; he definitely hadn't consciously made his vision change, or his hearing alter. His world was more monochrome than it had been and his ears were flattening the usual background noises of any big city.

"If there is a vampire deity out there.....Please send a boozy man my way, one who thumps his wife and kids." Tim muttered.

Right down by the river, in a particularly thick growth of trees next to the Rossauer Bridge. Tim was beginning to remember Vienna and its nightlife. He'd walked over the bridge quite a few times, returning to his room in the hotel where he'd worked. It was a cool evening, but it didn't surprise him to see a couple having stand up sex, while leaning against a tree. The guy was middle aged and even in the dark, Tim could see he was a three at most, while the young woman was about an eight. A lady of the night with a customer ? Or maybe the guy had got really lucky in a local bar.

"When hunting.....Patience is always a virtue." Clara had once told him.

The vampires were always coming out with things like that and most of it sounded nonsense. Laura had told him a few stories about Clara feeding recklessly near the Prospect of Whitby tavern on the Thames. Half a dozen had fed her that night and gone into the river, to be swept down river and out to sea. Still, in his current situation, patience definitely seemed a virtue. Their sexual repertoire was quite varied, at least for being standing up in a wood; on a rather cool night. Eventually the man gave the girl a handful of cash.

"Mystery solved.....She is a working girl." Tim mumbled, quietly.

A goodbye hug and the girl headed one way, while the man walked towards the Rossauer Bridge. A problem, his ideal target would soon be on the busy bridge and realistically, no longer a meal. On the other hand, the girl was walking towards the thickly planted area of trees. Tim was beginning to see why it was important to be flexible in his feeding habits. Did he want to keep to his ideal target type and maybe go hungry, or follow the working girl ? Tim followed the girl.

"How much did he give you ?"

Boyfriend, pimp, or maybe a mugger looking for a little easy robbery ? The girl seemed to know him and mentioned an amount of money that wasn't really that much, considering how it had been earned. It was cheap competition from the east, driving down prices. All those Svetlanas coming in from Russia. He'd heard a lot of that kind of talk when he'd worked in Vienna and it always sounded like an excuse.

Tim's Austrian had never been perfect and it had been a while since he'd had the need to speak the language. He understood enough to know the man was the girl's pimp. She gave him a large handful of money and walked away, heading towards the centre of the city. Her pimp remained there, counting the cash. It was as if the vampire deity not only existed, they were also answering his prayer for the ideal victim. A pimp.....Who probably treated his girls badly.

"You'll never know why.....But you're my perfect person to meet tonight." Said Tim.

The man turned towards him and he was a large man, broad at the shoulders. He definitely wasn't scared about being spoken to by a stranger in the dark.

"Got a type ?" Asked the pimp. "I can call someone and arrange something."

"You misunderstood.....You are my perfect victim." Said Tim.

"Fuck off, weirdo."

Tim grabbed the man and threw him to the ground. As he pushed his fangs against the pimp's throat, he picked up the smell of cigarettes and something else. Garlic, the man had probably eaten quite recently.

"Get off me you pervert.....I've got a knife." Said the pimp.

Another battle skill, probably ? It might have been stress and the heat of the moment, but Tim suddenly understood Austrian as well as he had when he'd worked in Vienna. Maybe the pimp was carrying a blade; he seemed to be trying to get something out of a pocket. Tim dug his fangs into the man's neck and the neurotoxin release was automatic. It went into the human bloodstream and caused paralysis and deep sedation, often leading to unconsciousness.

"Thank you for the blood." Tim muttered.

Clara thanked those she fed on, as did Laura. Tim thought it was a good tradition and well worth copying. Laura talked about feeding on human blood as making her giddy with pleasure. Daniel had described it as a kind of euphoria. Tim's description of it later, described it as drinking six measures of vodka in one mouthful. Once the pimp's heart stopped beating, Tim stopped drinking. He leant back and rested against a tree.

"Was it good ?" Asked Laura.

There she was, only a few feet away from him. She'd probably watched everything, even him following the working girl.

"That.....Oh, Laura; that was amazing." Said Tim. "Still is, the buzz is still there."

"For a moment, I thought you were going to feed on the girl." Said Laura.

"Being hones; for a moment.....I almost did." Said Tim. "The pimp was better though, larger and much more blood in his veins."

"You did well." Said Laura.

She sat next to him and rested her back against the same tree. He looked up and realised the battle skills were still there. He could see the Milky Way through the usual clouds and light pollution from the city.

"I can see every star in the Milky Way.....It's amazing." Said Tim.

"One day we'll go to the first forest and talk to the first people.....They will tell you the origin, of everything. Vampires existed before humans, which is pretty mind blowing." Said Laura.

"How did that work ?" Asked Tim.

"They were a lot less fussy then; about what they ate." Said Laura. "The first people will explain it better than I can."

Tim could have leant against that tree for hours, but it was a public place and a dead pimp was lying amongst the leaf litter. After about twenty minutes the buzz from the blood began to fade.

"Oh well, time to dump the pimp in the river." Said Tim.

"I'll help.....We can carry him between us." Said Laura. "It'll look as though we're helping a drunk friend to get home."

"Ahhh, a good friend.....I'll remember the taste of his blood forever." Said Tim.

They had no idea of tides on the Danube, but the river was lapping at the river wall when they arrived there. Maybe not ideal, but the pimp would end up in a few feet of river water. More than enough to ruin any DNA they might have left on him.

"With luck, the tide will come in and wash him miles upstream, or downstream." Said Tim.

The dead guy was almost gone; they had him hanging over the river. Laura was suddenly resisting the pull of gravity and holding onto the pimp; stopping his fall into the grubby river water.

"Did you take his wallet ?" Asked Laura. "Did you even look through his pockets ?"

"No.....I mean; it didn't feel right." Said Tim.

"To hell with feeling right, Tim Chance." Said Laura. "There is no such thing as bad blood and there is no such as thing as bad money. We're doing alright, but for centuries our kind has survived on what they could take from those they fed on. Put it in a sock at the bottom of your sock drawer if you like, but always take their cash.....Always."

"Yes, I remember Simon mentioning that." Said Tim. "I'll always look through their pockets."

"And their jewellery." Said Laura.

Tim didn't find a wallet, but the pimp had a metal clasp. There was so much cash; the clasp was having trouble holding it all. There had to be enough used notes to pay for their current dream; which was several weeks of luxury living somewhere hot and sunny.

"Wow, that is a lot of cash." Said Tim.

"And you were happy to give it to the river." Said Laura. "I'm not nagging, not really.....Next time you'll know to check."

They let the pimp drop and heard the loud splash, as he hit the water.

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Raine liked being in the Hornsey house, the place made her feel comfortable. Clara was watching her as she fed Justin, but she'd been told that would end soon. Justin was being fed solids most of the time now, jars of baby food laced with blood; his mother's blood.

"You'll soon get my boy to yourself.....Don't spoil him." Clara had said.

It wasn't that Clara didn't trust her to not harm her son; the caution was because Justin might hurt her; he'd already, sort of accidentally, bitten her arm. Raine resisted even thinking about the word vampire, but Justin's true nature was fairly obvious. Raine liked the child; the way he laughed when she ran her hand through his hair.

"My boy obviously likes you." Said Clara. "Tomorrow we'll try you looking after him on your own; just for a couple of hours."

"Your son is precious, I know that." Said Raine. "Give me a weapon and I'll protect him; with my life if it came to that."

Clara could have laughed, which would have been dreadful. Instead she moved her chair closer and briefly touched her hand.

"There are protectors all around, some you will only see if Justin is in danger." Said Clara. "Has anyone mentioned Karkengara to you?"

"Ronnie mentioned him.....She said his appearance would scare me, but he's here to defend your son. Ronnie said he's a dragon."

A dragon indeed, it was obviously nonsense. Raine felt embarrassed to mention that to Clara. Clara settled back in her chair, with a 'this will take a while,' look on her face.

"Karkengara is known as the bringer of fire." Said Clara. "He is actually a deity for people who no longer exists. He has a temple in the underworld, but there is no one left to worship him. According to Karkengara, he isn't a dragon, though he does look like one. He's huge by the way, usually only his head will fit into the house."

A dragon too big to enter the house, apart from its head. It sounded crazy, but Clara was one of the sanest people she knew. As for teasing her, or lying? No, Clara would never do that. The only other option was that there really was a dragon linked to the child and the house.

"Is he dangerous?" Asked Raine.

"Only to those who wish to hurt my son." Said Clara.

"Can I meet him?" Asked Raine. "I have to eventually and I'd prefer if you were with me; just for the first time."

"Everyone says that, even Niña jumped when she first saw him." Said Clara. "I can't guarantee he'll come if I call, he can be quite busy. Would you like me to try?"

"Oh, yes please, Clara." Said Raine.

Raine kept feeding Justin spoonfuls of baby food with a few added drops of blood. The boy seemed to be growing well on his new diet. That might have been the vegetables in the baby food, but was more than likely something to do with the blood.

"Karkengara.....Are you close?" Said Clara. "I have need of you.....Just for a minute or so."

There was a temperature change in the nursery, a slight increase of a degree, maybe a little more. It seemed the bringer of fire name had a basis in truth.

"I can feel him.....Don't be scared, Raine." Said Clara. "He's a good friend."

The dragon's head began as the tip of his snout, as it appeared out of the wall at the furthest end of the room. Maybe it was Karkengara's way of preparing her for seeing the rest of his enormous head. The snout twitched for a while, before coming further into the room.

"Here I come.....Don't jump, I'm harmless."

It was a nice voice, a friendly sounding voice; the sort of voice you could trust. Well, Raine felt she could trust that voice.

"I'm prepared.....I promise not to jump." Said Raine.

She still might have jumped, if Clara hadn't held her hand. The snout was green, as was much of the rest of the dragon's head. A truly huge head the size of a small car. Not all of it fitted into the nursery, but there was enough of it to realise how dragon like the creature was. The area above its jaw was a red(ish) colour, as was the areas behind its eyes. The head stopped moving into the room, making the nursery look a lot smaller. Justin was happy, obviously liking his friend being there.

"Can I just say, I'm not really a dragon." Said Karkengara. "I believe that dragon's may have been created in my image; I even suspect I know who did it. But please remember that I am a deity, not a dragon."

"I will.....I will remember." Said Raine. "May I touch you?"

"Yes, I don't mind.....I'm sure we're going to be friends." Said Karkengara.

Raine had to get up, which meant giving Justin to his mother. There was a moment of confusion, until Raine was on her feet, with her hand on the nose of the dragon; who insisted he wasn't a dragon.

"My skin is a bit rough." Said Karkengara. "I've been told though, that it isn't unpleasant to touch."

"Very cool skin." Said Raine, as she touched Karkengara.

It was no use; she had to stroke the enormous head. Stroking a deity probably broke so many rules, yet she had to do it. Raine started from just above his eyes and stroked the enormous snout, right down until it reached Karkengara's upper jaw. No complaints from the deity, none at all. No purring sound, but he did give a few contented sighs. Raine did it twice more.

"Ahhhh, that feels so good.....Your skin is so cool." Said Raine.

"I'm cold blooded, Raine." Said Karkengara. "I must leave now, but I'm sure we'll see each other very soon. If you ever need me while in the house, calling me usually works."

One last stroke of that noble head, one last contented sigh from the bringer of fire. Karkengara vanished, which seemed to upset Justin. Just the muttering sound that was usually a prelude to crying, but Clara managed to sooth him.

"You stroked Karkengara; you actually stroked a divine being." Said Clara. "I'm jealous, even Laura has never worked up the nerve to actually stroke him. Justin strokes him as if he was a pet cat, but that's different."

"I know.....I must have broken so many rules of etiquette." Said Raine.

"He likes you, or he'd have told you to stop." Said Clara. "I have visited his temple in the underworld. A huge place, with lots of statues that look like dragons. It's all very beautiful and a bit sad. His people are gone and no one worships him. I always say a prayer over his shrine. If you want.....You can come with me the next time ?"

"Yes, that would be nice." Said Raine.

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Mabina looked at the sandy beach and the ocean beyond the beach. Waves there, large waves; the ocean had to be huge to generate such large waves. There was a salt tang to the spray coming up as each wave crashed into the shore. A salt water ocean like home, but Mabina knew they were no longer on their home world. Vampires had extremely good senses and quite a few extra skills linked to those senses. Her breathing was slightly harder than at home, there had to be less oxygen in the air. Her weight had decreased too, just by a tiny amount.

There just might be a local problem somewhere that decreased the oxygen, but nothing local can decrease gravity. A constant pull of 9.8 meters per second squared, no matter where, no matter when. It was a constant on planet Earth that couldn't be argued with.

"Where the hell have we ended up ?" Asked Ronnie.

"I have no idea, but one thing I'm certain of." Said Mabina. "We're no longer on our own world."

"You mean we're not on planet Earth ?" Asked Niña.

"I am saying exactly that." Said Mabina. "The air is a little strange and as for the gravity.....That is simply wrong. We're no longer on planet Earth."

Mabina should have been in a panic, but she wasn't. Clara had told Niña about the unorthodox way to use the dragon statues, which meant Clara must once have been standing on that beach. The rest was just sound logic.

"Clara was here and she obviously wasn't trapped forever." Said Mabina. "We need to treat this place as a test of some kind. There is a way back home; we just need to find it."

The ocean was huge, noisy and there was the smell everyone says is ozone, but is really rotting seaweed. The crashing waves were grabbing everyone's attention, until Ronnie noticed something. "Those storm clouds are getting closer." Said Ronnie. "We need to find shelter, or we'll be exploring in saturated clothing."

"We could call out for Tempest." Said Niña. "I'm sure he'd come and help us."

"Where would be the fun in that?" Asked Ronnie.

Mabina had a day shift at the hospital the next day, so she'd been thinking about trying to call for Tempest. The place intrigued her though, so she wasn't in a massive hurry to get back to her own world.

"I'm sure we've all got places we need to be." Said Mabina. "Let's give it a while though, before we start shouting for help."

"There are buildings in the distance." Said Ronnie. "They look a long way off."

"Then we need to start walking." Said Mabina.

The sand became soil high in gravel for a while, where tiny green plants were trying to get a foothold. The gravel became recognisable as topsoil, after they'd been trudging for close to a mile. That brought its own problems in the form of large bushes. The tiny green plants could be crushed under foot, but the bushes couldn't; which meant walking around them. The second mile took them longer to walk than the first mile. All the time the dark storm clouds were getting closer.

"I hate saying it, but the buildings look to be ruins." Said Niña.

"We just need one bit of roof to get under." Said Ronnie.

Lots of columns in the architecture and the sand had blown in and stayed. The closer they got, the more of a ruin the buildings looked. They went from walking on bush covered soil, to cracked and uneven paving. In many ways the broken paving was better. Mabina heard the first crack of thunder, when she saw a building that still had a solid roof, or at least a good two thirds of an intact roof.

"There.....We might get inside before the deluge hits." Said Mabina.

"It'll be a close thing." Said Niña.

Very undignified, but only they knew they'd started running as the first few drops of rain hit the ground. Cold rain, it made Mabina's neck twitch as a few drops hit her neck and face. By the time they were all under a reasonably solid looking roof, the rain was beyond heavy and they were all quite wet. Not that cold in the ruined building, but too cold to walk around naked while their clothes dried.

"Someone else has sheltered here." Said Ronnie. "They had a fire; there's still a pile of dried twigs and branches."

"Good, we won't all die of exposure." Said Mabina.

She helped Ronnie stack the wood where someone else's fire had scorched the ground and left a pile of ashes. Niña had a cheap gas lighter, which she said had never let her down. It had obviously never been caught in a storm before. Mabina knew a little basic witchcraft. A simple fire cantrip gave them a hot, warming fire almost instantly.

"Mabina.....You're a life saver." Said Ronnie. "I can now get out of these wet clothes."

"Eurghhhh.....Wet clothes are so clammy." Said Niña.

Clothes were laid out over the broken stone slabs closest to their fire. Then Ronnie noticed that the lightning was bright green, a truly vibrant green. The rain had got into her phone, which meant no souvenir pictures of the other worldly lightning bolts.

"No one will believe me." Said Ronnie.

"My phone still works." Said Niña.

Ronnie was happy; she could take lots of pictures of the bright, almost fluorescent green lightning. They had very little food in their packs or fresh water, but that was something else which could wait a while to be dealt with. They sat around the fire for a while, watching the ferocious storm.

"The storms here might last for months." Said Ronnie.

Typical Ronnie comment, always looking on the bright side of life. Niña wandered around, looking at the walls and the various collapsed columns.

"I wonder what this building used to be?" Said Ronnie.

"There's some writing on this wall.....At least I think it's writing." Said Niña.

Writing might mean a clue.....It might mean they'd be home fairly quickly. The writing on the wall was carved into the stone and looked a little like cuneiform, but it wasn't. The language was nothing Mabina had ever seen before. She'd been hoping for a simple 'got-ya,' from Clara. And a way to get home of course.

"Can you read it, Mabina?" Asked Ronnie.

"No, not a single word."

Mabina leant on the wall to wipe the dust out of the carved characters. That section of the wall moved, ever so slightly. Mabina pushed and a section of the wall definitely went back about an eighth of an inch.

"Push.....Come on, help me.....Push!" Said Mabina.

They pushed, two vampires and Ronnie. Gradually the section of the wall went back, turning as it went. It was a door, which gave access to a long dark passage. It wasn't night, but the storm was making it as dark as dusk. As her eyes adjusted to the lack of light, Mabina could see a glow about twenty yards along the passage.

"There's some light; must be an opening to the outside." Said Mabina.

"I know a light spell." Said Niña. "Laura taught me, she's taught me a lot of useful things."

"Then you can use your spell and go in first." Said Mabina.

Not to be outdone, Ronnie pulled a large burning branch out of their fire and carried it in front of her; as though it was a torch. It spat out the occasional red hot spark, but it was brighter than most basic light spells.

"Looks like I go first." Said Ronnie.

With the spark spitting torch held up in front of her, Ronnie entered the narrow passage.

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Gen Debré hadn't asked Akiva to accompany her as she searched for the philosophers stone, but it was nice to have him watching her back. Maybe it was crazy, but she trusted the mercenary and semi-officially dead man. She'd once considered faking her own death, purely as an academic exercise. She knew the amount of work it took to be semi-officially dead. Westcott Villa was a huge rambling place, but they'd seen Youcef twice, as they went from room to chamber and yet more rooms and chambers. They'd hadn't seen Sophia, but they did once hear her shouting at Youcef; threatening to cut him if he kept following her about. That tallied pretty well with Gen's feelings about Youcef. Akiva had been dawdling a little in the room they were in, but he looked to be dawdling with a purpose.

"Are you alright?" She asked.

"Were you told about my history with the Psochics?" Asked Akiva.

"A bit and being honest, I was asked not to tell you what I knew." Said Gen.

“Good old Nathalie, playing everyone against everyone.” Said Akiva. “If she didn’t pay above the market rate, I’d stop working for her. Anyway, you must realise I’m not just a plain vanilla human male ?”

“A certain amount of serious augmentation was mentioned.” Said Gen.

It was a difficult situation as Nathalie had asked her to not mention that she’d been shown Akiva’s file. On the other hand Gen had Akiva right there to protect her in Ethiopia. Nathalie might be the boss, but she was about three and a half thousand miles away in Brittany.

“The Psochics made me Akiva plus, which they probably thought would please me. It didn’t and I still have several of their science team on my list. Eventually I’ll deal with them all.” Said Akiva. “I feel things Gen and there is real power here, in this rather grotty bedroom. Do you know who used this room ?”

At last a question she could answer accurately and without the potential to seriously piss off her boss. She had a list on her phone of who had tended to sleep in which room. A few key presses and.....

“Ahhh, officially this was a spare and rarely used bedroom.” Said Gen.

“Please don’t think I’m crazy.” Said Akiva, with a grin.

“At the moment I’m only toying with the idea that you’re nuts.” Said Gen. “That may increase to full on crazy as the day progresses.”

She liked him, despite the file that said he wasn’t quite human; not any more. He was a mercenary who’d once worked for the Psochics, yet she liked him. It was chemistry of course, she realised that. And pheromones of course, everyone blamed inappropriate romantic feelings on pheromones.

“I hear something as I go near the large wardrobe, some words in French.” Said Akiva.

“What do you hear ?” Gen Asked.

“Listen to the furniture; Écoutez les meubles.”

It did sound crazy, but there was nothing in Akiva’s file about periods of hearing things. He was likely to be a little paranoid; there really were people out to get him. Schizophrenic though ? No, he seemed pretty stable.

“Any piece of furniture in particular ?” She asked.

“The huge old wardrobe would be my guess.” Said Akiva. “My guess would be that it has something to tell you, and only you.”

Some of the furniture in the bedroom had been moved about to clean it out. The heavy old hardwood wardrobe was all on its own, up against a wall. It had to weigh a lot and she hoped that if she heard something, it didn’t include having to move the thing.

“I’m willing to give it a go.” She said.

Gen leant her head against the wardrobe, her right ear pushed against the wood. Her French was reasonable, but she tried the question in English.

“What do you have to say to me ?” She asked.

Gen felt her face go red; it was all far too embarrassing. Talking to a wardrobe indeed. It stopped being silly and embarrassing when the voice came out of the wardrobe. A deep sonorous voice, which made Akiva nod at her, as if to say ‘I told you so.’

“Search the top for a letter W carved into the frame.” Said the voice. “You’ll need a hammer, preferably an axe. Strike the W until the frame breaks. It will then be yours.”

“What will be mine ?” Asked Gen.

No answer and then after a minute or so, the wardrobe repeated the message; as if it was some kind of mystical answerphone.

"I know where there's a small axe." Said Akiva.

"Yes, I thought you might." Said Gen. "Go and get it, I'll wait here."

"You should come with me." Said Akiva. "There is something about this villa.....I'd be happier if we stayed together."

"I'm not helpless.....Go and get the axe."

Akiva went, though he didn't look happy about leaving her. One of the world's leading occultists had built the villa; of course it was going to have a weird vibe. Akiva seemed to be taking his time to get back, but it was a large building with many, many rooms. Gen sat down on the floor beside the wardrobe. It hid her from anyone looking in from the hallway. Half an hour later, Akiva returned; with an axe in his right hand.

"Sorry, I think someone moved it." Said Akiva.

"I think I'm supposed to use the axe." She said.

Akiva gave her the small axe and then they had to drag over a heavy chair to stand on. Gen had to clamber on top of the wardrobe to see the W, deeply carved into the hardwood frame. She had to squeeze between the wardrobe and the ceiling, to swing the axe.

"Be careful." Said Akiva.

The first strike with the axe, seemed to cause a century of dust to hurtle up into the air. Gen began coughing as she hit the frame again.

"Part of the frame is breaking away." She yelled.

By the fourth blow she could see a green leather bag inside the frame. Her fingers just about fitted in the hole in the frame. Dust of course, lots more dust around her, as she pulled out the leather bag.

"I've got it.....There was a leather bag hidden in the frame." She shouted.

"What's in it?" Asked Akiva. "Have you found the philosophers stone?"

"Not sure yet.....Hang on."

The light was bad up there, but the writing at the top of the pages she found, left her in no doubt.

There in that green leather bag, was a section from a genuine Psochic bible. Ripped out and stapled together was the alchemy section. The diagrams and instructions started on about the fifth page.

"It's not the philosophers stone." She yelled. "This is better, much better."

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