

Clara Copley

(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 21 – Pure Gold

‘Raine still looked shocked by the idea of Justin at the local primary. Clara imagined her expression when she learned that Clara intended to then enrol him with a local comprehensive. There’d be issues with religious events, but a stern letter to the head would deal with those. Clara was already looking up obscure religions for her son to supposedly be part of. No singing hymns at assembly for him.’

»

Gen Debré wondered if the other two were having a bad effect on her moral compass. She could accept that Nathalie had asked her to deal with Youcef's remains during a phone call, as though it had been the most natural thing in the world, but the others.....

“No use sulking, Gen.” Said Sophia Lombardi. “It’s not as if we can take him with us. And an anonymous call to the cops would have their forensics guys swarming all over the place.”

Akiva Yatsko had found the perfect hole in the ground not that far from Westcott Villa. Even pushing the deceased on a wobbly sack barrow hadn’t been that difficult. It seemed natural for him to be able to find places to dispose of bodies. Did Youcef have people; would he be missed ? Nathalie didn’t think so and Gen had never heard him mention anyone. Still, everyone has someone who’ll miss them.

“Our prints will be all over the villa.” Said Akiva. “Without a body there’ll be no crime scene. He did turn out to be a decent guy, but we’ve no real alternative. Say a few words over him if you like.”

“Yeah.....He protected me from that thing.” Added Sophia.

“I don’t know his religion.” Said Gen. “I hope that when he gets to wherever he’s judged, that their records are jammed up that day.”

“Amen to that sister.” Said Sophia, who started laughing.

Akiva did the deed, the interment of Youcef. The body had been wrapped in a sheet from the villa; they wouldn’t need them anymore. Akiva shoved Youcef into a wide deep hole in the ground. They all heard the thud when his body hit the bottom. The drop had taken a while; his final resting place was quite deep underground.

“Did he have people ?” Asked Sophia.

“Everyone has people.” Said Akiva.

“Nathalie will make sure someone knows.” Said Gen. “The Silver Dawn are quite good at that sort of thing. If he had a regular partner, they’ll be looked after; as will any children he might have supported.”

Akiva muttered something above the hole, that was too quiet to hear. That was it, the sack barrow was remembered by Sophia and they were heading back towards the villa. It had been a strange burial, but Gen thought the feelings had been more sincere than at most. She too hoped that the divine database was playing up; when it was her time to be judged.

“What time are they coming for us ?” Asked Akiva.

“About six.....The new place isn’t far.” Said Gen. “It’s a large walled compound on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. They’re even sending someone to pick up the car Youcef was driving.”

“The Silver Dawn do sound efficient.” Said Sophia.

They had to be packed up and ready to leave the villa, by the time the transport arrived to take them to their new location. Not a huge task, none of them had brought much with them. Nathalie had told her there’d be a small van to take away anything useful from Samuel Westcott’s alchemy laboratory. There just might be enough to fill a van, but the formulas were all they really needed; and the philosophers stone of course.

“Any staff at the new place ?” Asked Sophia. “Or are we taking it in turns to cook again ?”

“It’s a big place and fully staffed, according to Nathalie.” Said Gen. “I’m hoping that means we wake up to breakfast and coffee.”

“I’ll miss your toasted bacon sandwiches.” Said Akiva.

“Do we all get a cut from the proceeds of any gold we make ?” Asked Sophia.

“That’s per any agreement you made with Nathalie Aurigny.” Said Gen.

She was learning as she went along, and becoming tougher and more cynical. Once she had insisted that the other two shared in the proceeds of any sold gold. Now she was happy for Nathalie to give them nothing if she chose. They’d get their basic fee and as Akiva kept saying; Nathalie paid well.

“Home sweet home.” Said Akiva, as he opened the front door.

“Today we need to be busy-busy-busy.” Said Gen. “Everything we need has to be boxed up or crated; there are lots of empty boxes in the laboratory. There’ll be no returning for anything we forget.”

“I won’t miss this place.....I told you there was a bad vibe.” Said Sophia.

~ ~

Clara realised Raine could do a lot more than just looking after Justin when she went out to work. The car was already there to take Clara to work, a meeting regarding Cyril buying a new night club venue in Watford. She had registered that Raine had wandered past her, with Justin in her arms; but she trusted Raine completely. Alex was her driver, who normally waited without comment. She felt the need to text Clara to tell her the meeting with Cyril was quite a long way from Hornsey.

“A hurry up text from my driver.....Whatever next ?” Clara mumbled.

The door to Niña’s room under the stairs was open and there was Raine, explaining to her son what surveillance cameras did. Not that Justin would understand any of it, he’d just about realised everyone in the house wasn’t called mum. Raine was speaking in a soft voice.

“If anyone ever tries to get inside and hurt us, we’ll see them on these screens.” Said Raine.

“I’m glad you’re looking at the screens while Niña is away.” Said Clara. “Being truthful though, when trouble does arrive at our door; we tend to be expecting it.”

“Does the system record any suspicious movements near the house ?” Asked Raine. “I could set it up to do that, if you’d like me to ?”

“I’ll just text my driver so that she doesn’t panic.” Said Clara.

Justin Ned Atherton gurgled and laughed for no reason, which he did quite a bit. Clara sent a text to Alex, saying she’d be with her in a few minutes. The woman drove fast anyway; she’d make up for the time lost.

“I know you can do more, I saw what you’d accomplished in Jerusalem.” Said Clara. “My problem is not treading on anyone’s toes. Niña would take it very badly if I gave you control of the building’s defences. She doesn’t even like Mabina taking an interest.”

“I could talk to her, give her a few pointers.” Said Raine.

"Hmmmm..... Probably not a good idea." Said Clara. "Everyone you see around the house has their own area of expertise. I will think of something for you, I promise. Just give me a few days to think about it. Have I ever told you about Cyril H Carter, my boss ?"

"No."

"I can see places where your experience would be useful." Said Clara. "I'll need to talk to him and come up with a few ideas. Wherever you seem to fit in, your duties aren't likely to be totally legal; does that worry you ?"

"Few of my jobs have ever been totally legit." Said Raine. "There is Justin though; I've got to know him now."

"I see anything for Cyril as filling the gaps where you're not looking after my son." Said Clara. "By the time he's starting at the local primary school, you'll be ready to work full time for Cyril."

Raine gave her the eyes wide open look, which so many others had given her; when she'd mentioned her son and state schooling. Even Mabina had given her the look.

"You intend to send him to the local primary ?" Asked Raine.

"I do, with private tuition over the school holidays." Said Clara. "My son needs to be able to mix with others and be well educated. Noah suggested a kind of hybrid education, state and private; and I like the idea."

"It sounds.....Interesting." Said Raine.

Raine still looked shocked by the idea of Justin at the local primary. Clara imagined her expression when she learned that Clara intended to then enrol him with a local comprehensive. There'd be issues with religious events, but a stern letter to the head would deal with those. Clara was already looking up obscure religions for her son to supposedly be part of. No singing hymns at assembly for him.

"I must go now, or Alex will try to do Mach 1 on the M1." Said Clara. "Don't fiddle with the screens, or the recording tech, Niña wouldn't appreciate it. I'm not asking you to be everyone's best friend, but you need to get on with everyone in the house."

"I won't fiddle with anything, I promise." Said Raine.

By the time Clara got to the car, Alex was giving her a look of angst, or it might have been enjoyment. Clara was sure she enjoyed putting the pedal to the metal. She'd done an advanced drivers course in another role, before Cyril had hired her. Clara got in the back of the car; there were a few of her things already there, including a couple of half read paperbacks.

"Ok, Alex.....I can't be late." Said Clara. "Do your full Sterling Moss."

Yes, there was definitely a smile on her face.

"Don't worry.....I'll get you there on time." Said Alex.

~ ~

Meanwhile, Niña had worse things to worry about than Raine adjusting the CCTV at the Hornsey house. The strange looking four armed warriors were coming at them in wave after wave.

"How many of them are there.....We seem to have killed so many." Said Ronnie.

"There looked to be hundreds of them, maybe thousands." Said Mabina.

Vampires are tough, but their skin is far from being impervious to sharp weapons. Niña had a few shallow wounds, as did Mabina. Wounds that could have easily been deep and potentially fatal. Years of experience had saved them, along with their vampire speed and strength. Ronnie hadn't done so well, blood was seeping through holes in her clothing. She'd suffered at least two deep wounds, but there'd been no opportunity to look at them; let alone do anything to stop them bleeding. Niña thought Ronnie would die first, with her and Mabina not lasting that long after that.

There were simply too many of the warriors with swords. They weren't particularly good fighters, there were just hundreds of them. Brave though, they didn't seem worried about the loss of so many of their number. Ronnie was coughing up a little blood, not a good sign. She'd already made a comment about seeing her Jim again.

"Someone should yell for Karkengara again." Said Ronnie.

"We're on another world and inside a stone pyramid." Said Mabina. "I hate to say it, but we have to forget about the dragon saving us."

"He's not a dragon." Said Niña.

"Whatever." Said Mabina.

Niña got in a good blow with her blade. A warrior twice her size had hit the ground with blood pouring out of their throat. It was a blow Niña felt proud of, but she couldn't repeat it a few hundred times, much less a thousand times; no one could.

"Karkengara." Shouted Ronnie.

The enemy were still pouring down the passageway towards them. Edging backwards was out of the question, they'd leave themselves open to attack. Facing the warriors was the only way, but it wasn't working. Numbers were against them, huge numbers of trained warriors.

"Karkengara." Shouted Ronnie, again.

"Well it can't hurt." Muttered Niña. "Karkengara." She yelled.

Mabina and her, had been doing it unconsciously really; trying to shield Ronnie from the worst of it. Mabina took a blow from an enemy that went in deep. A stabbing blow from a sword near her left hip. Not deadly, but it would leave her with a limp. Mabina struck back, almost removing the warrior's head from their shoulders.

"Fuck.....I suppose it can't hurt." Said Mabina. "Karkengara, you lazy useless bastard.....We need you." She yelled.

There was a sound, like a huge wind in a very tiny place. The warriors instantly lost interest in two vampires and a human. They were going back the other way now, into the chamber which may well have been their Holy of Holies. It seemed they could talk with the right motivation and they were talking a lot. Not that Niña could understand any of it. A small tongue of flame entering the passage and a very dragon like roar, left Niña certain who'd arrived to save them.

"It's him.....The bringer of fire is here." Said Niña.

"About time." Said Mabina. "We should go back into the large chamber. Do you think you can walk that far, Ronnie ?"

"Karkengara fighting them; I'll crawl if I have to." Said Ronnie. "That is something I have to see."

Not every warrior got out of their way, there was the occasional fight. Most were trying to get back into the huge central chamber of the pyramid. By luck, Niña was first to enter the chamber and she wasn't having to fight for her life. He was there, the deity who looked like a dragon. Karkengara was breathing out so much fire, that Niña and the others had to keep up against the chamber wall. It was hot in there and getting hotter; far too hot to be comfortable.

"Wow, I've never seen all of him, standing on all four legs." Said Ronnie. "He's so huge."

"And luckily, he's on our side." Said Niña.

Karkengara was in the centre of the room, surrounded by the warriors. There were also a few of what they'd assumed to be priests, armed with a kind of cudgel. None of the weapons seemed to be doing any harm to the bringer of fire, but he was killing them in huge numbers.

"We should help Karkengara." Said Niña.

"He's doing fine without us." Said Mabina. "Ronnie is my main concern; she's lost a lot of blood. Help me get her clothing up and out of the way."

"Yes, of course." Said Niña.

"Oh, crap.....This is going to hurt, isn't it ?" Asked Ronnie.

"Probably, but you're tough." Said Mabina.

While Karkengara used fire, his teeth and his claws to deal with the seemingly endless stream of warriors; Niña helped Mabina to remove Ronnie's jacket and denim shirt. Her jeans were pulled down over her rear, so that Mabina could check for wounds.

"Looks like only two sword wounds are in your side, but both are deep." Said Mabina. "I put a couple of dressings in my pack, but I'll need to use someone's spare shirt."

"I brought a change of clothing.....You never know." Said Niña.

Mabina ripped and tore one of her favourite tops into strips, to use as bandages. Ronnie started yelling when Mabina pushed a wound dressing into each of the bleeding holes in her side.

"I can keep you alive, but you'll need surgery." Said Mabina. "Begin thinking of an explanation for the wounds that will convince a doctor in A & E."

"Yeah, one that won't get them calling the cops." Added Niña.

Niña watched as Mabina wrapped the shreds of her top around Ronnie, to hold the dressings in place. It had to be painful; Ronnie began using language which would have shocked a Docker. Niña helped dress Ronnie, but she looked very weak and still in pain. It looked as though they'd need to carry her. Not that it was obvious how Karkengara was going to get them out of the pyramid and back to Hornsey.

"And lastly.....I think you'll like this, Ronnie." Said Mabina.

Mabina muttered a few words and touched Ronnie's forehead. Niña knew the pain had been reduced, just by the expression on Ronnie's face.

"Good ?" Asked Mabina.

"Very good, thank you." Said Ronnie.

"That'll keep the worst of the pain at bay, at least for a while." Said Mabina.

Karkengara was still crushing and burning any of the warriors who dared to attack him. The vast chamber with its podium had to be their Holy of Holies. It was the only thing that made sense; it was somewhere they'd all die to protect. Several priests were close to the podium, all of them trying to hit the bringer of fire with a club, or a metal mace. All of the priests looked alike to Niña, but one of them was actually hurting Karkengara. They had a mace and every blow that connected with the bringer of fire, was causing a wound. There were several small wounds, all bleeding a yellowish blood.

"The bastards.....They're hurting Karkengara." Said Mabina.

They all moved forward, including Ronnie. Crazy really, but no one was going to hurt their friend and get away with it. Niña had assumed all the priests were just ordinary priests, but the one hurting the bringer of fire was wearing a purple coloured sash. Karkengara knocked aside several warrior and grabbed that particular priest in his jaws. As he began to chew, every warrior in the chamber dropped their weapon and began to make a dreadful, sorrowful whining sound. It was as if someone had turned them off in some way.

"Now is our chance to get out of here." Said Mabina. "Don't run, it might trigger them to attack. We'll walk to Karkengara."

As the bringer of fire spat out the remains of the priest, the lamenting gained in volume.

"Don't dawdle.....Run to me." Yelled Karkengara.

They ran towards the deity who looked like a dragon, stopping when they were right up against his huge flank. There was a wonderful feeling of being secure; no one, or thing, could harm such a huge and powerful deity.

“Do we have to climb onto you ?” Asked Niña.

“You could, though using my cool breath is easier.” Said Karkengara. “Stand closer together.....I’ll send you to the house in Hornsey. Forgive Clara for sending you here, she wasn’t thinking straight on that particular day.”

“We could have died.” Muttered Ronnie.

“But you didn’t.” Said the bringer of fire.

He breathed on them, a cool wind with the slight scent of jasmine. For a moment it was as though they were surrounded by a thick fog. The next moment they were stood in the alleyway to the right of the house; with Mabina’s car right in front of them. There was of course, no sign of Karkengara.

“Hurry.....Get in my car.” Said Mabina. “We’ll soon be at the local hospital.”

They gently put Ronnie in the back and covered her in a car blanket. There was that slight feeling of unreality. They’d been inside a pyramid on another world, surrounded by dead and dying warriors.

Now they were in Hornsey and Mabina was about to drive Ronnie to an NHS hospital.

“Get in, Niña.” Snapped Mabina. “You do dawdle.”

“No I don’t.”

She never dawdled, but the argument about that could wait. Niña got into the front passenger seat of the car and Mabina drove left, away from the house. At least one of their phones still worked.

There was the log on sound as it found a network it liked. Then several beeps as it picked up missed messages and other alerts.

“Back to civilisation.” Said Mabina, as they were caught behind a slow moving bus.

“We never did agree a story to explain Ronnie’s wounds.” Said Niña.

“Oh, Crap.....No we didn’t and she’s asleep now.” Said Mabina. “We could drop her off just outside the hospital. I know how to avoid the cameras.”

“Yeah, but.....Ronnie is our friends.” Said Niña. “Clara says she’s like family. We couldn’t just abandon her, could we ?”

The slow bus gave them a chance to look at each other for a full minute, working out what the other’s expression might mean.

“No, we can’t dump her on the steps.” Said Mabina. “For better or worse, we owe it to Ronnie to stay with her. She did lose the love of her life not that long ago.”

All the permutations of cause and effect ran through her mind. As they gently removed Ronnie from the car outside A & E, Niña knew they’d done the right thing.

“We’re going to go to jail, I know it.” Said Niña.

“No we won’t, Clara knows some very important people.” Said Mabina.

~ ~

As Laura entered the occult laboratory of the Albrecht’s, she noticed a dead guard on the floor; and that Adelaide was limping. Luckily the two things weren’t linked in any way. The owner proprietor of the Red Rose looked too cheerful to have been shot, but Laura needed to ask the question.

“Your leg, Adelaide.....Have you been shot ?” Asked Laura.

Tim was smiling, so Adelaide couldn’t have been injured by anything as dangerous as gunfire.

“No, she dropped a heavy stone mixing bowl on her foot.” Said Tim.

“Stop smirking, Tim.” Said Adelaide. “It really hurts.....I think it might be broken.”

"If it was broken you wouldn't be able to walk on it." Said Thomas. "Probably a sprain....If you like, I could take a look at it. I'm good with sprains, or at least I used to be."

"No, I'll be fine." Said Adelaide.

"I have no intention of touching your foot, I merely have the expertise." Said Thomas. "Tim will do any massaging and manipulation that might be needed. If Tim doesn't mind of course ?"

"I'll do whatever helps her to walk without it hurting." Said Tim.

"Well, if it's Tim touching my foot.....I don't mind." Said Adelaide.

Laura turned away so that Adelaide couldn't see the grin on her face. So, Adelaide had a bit of a crush on her Tim. It wasn't rare; Laura had managed to snag herself a good looking guy.

"You guys get Adelaide mobile; I'll see what I want to steal." Said Laura.

There was a pile of loot on a bench already, including the heavy mixing bowl that had nearly broken Adelaide's foot. Obviously that hadn't put her off wanting to steal it. Laura was addicted to hardware shops, the places with screws, nails and all sorts of useful thing; hanging up in small plastic packets. She'd once gone into Halfords for a wrench and spent an entire afternoon there. The shelves in the laboratory were far more fascinating than anything in Halfords.

"Did you find the codex ?" Asked Tim.

"Yeah, it's in my pack." Said Laura.

"Can I see it ?"

"Later.....I'm looking for something." Said Laura.

She was hooked on all the bright, sparkly and generally fascinating things on the shelves. Many of them were going home with her, but she hadn't decided which. She'd summon her Gudara and he could take it all to their apartment at the Silver Dawn base in Brittany.

~ ~

Akiva knew the Silver Dawn had money and resources. As the strong looking gates of the walled compound were opened, he couldn't help wondering how much Nathalie had paid to rent it as their base for creating pure gold. The walls were high and thick, definitely not somewhere likely to be bothered by casual burglars. Of course, a serious attack would be by armed fighters; who'd simply put an explosive charge against the gates. Still, it was nice to feel they'd be sleeping somewhere better protected than Westcott Villa.

"Who the hell owns this place ?" Asked Sophia.

"Might be Nathalie's weekend place." Said Akiva.

They were a convoy, which Akiva didn't like; people took far too much interest in people arriving anywhere as a convoy. Drivers had been sent to drive their personal vehicles; Nathalie had decided they'd be easier to protect if they were travelling together. They were in a large and heavy SUV, while the contents of Westcott's laboratory were in the van following them. Add their cars and it was a long and interesting looking convoy.

"Arriving as a convoy, I don't like that." Said Akiva. "The locals will get interested in us, maybe too interested."

"It wasn't my decision." Said Gen. "I think Nathalie organised everything in a bit of a rush."

There was one large building in the compound, probably where they'd be living while there. There were three smaller buildings, one of them right against the far wall. It reminded Akiva of TV pictures of the place where the Americans had finally got Bin Laden, but he wasn't going to mention that.

"We'll be fine.....It looks much better than the last place; and more secure." Said Sophia.

"Are the drivers staying with us ?" Asked Akiva.

"No, they'll be going and taking the SUV with them." Said Gen. "We get to keep the van. There are staff though, which will be nice. Clean rooms and nice food we haven't had to cook ourselves."

"How many staff?" Asked Sophia.

"I don't know, but there we are going to be met by someone who will." Said Gen. "A compound manager according to Nathalie. He lives on the premises, Nathalie told me. Oh, I almost forgot.....Most of the staff are armed."

Sophia gave a sort of sigh, which seemed to indicate she wasn't sure if she approved with that. Akiva was unsure too, but he was willing to give the situation the benefit of the doubt, for now. Armed staff might be useful if the compound was attacked, or they might turn on them.

"The guy at the front door looks like manager material." Said Sophia. "Does he usually live on the premises?"

"Yes." Said Gen. "Nathalie told me his name is Mesfin Tesfaye; she considers him to be trustworthy."

"Let's get out of there and meet him." Said Sophia.

They clambered out of the large SUV and Akiva instantly knew the compound wasn't going to be another place like the Westcott Villa. Staff were there, grabbing their bags to take them to their rooms. Two men and one woman, all with pretty good English. Any gaps in their spoken English, could be filled in with one of the languages Akiva spoke. Akiva began to get a good feeling about the place. He'd stayed in hotels that had been far less attentive.

"My name is Mesfin Tesfaye, the compound manager. Everyone calls me Mesfin. Get settled into your rooms and there will be refreshments served in the dining room. We want you to enjoy your stay."

"Well, I'm already impressed, Mesfin." Said Sophia.

"Where is our van going to be kept?" Asked Gen.

"It'll be locked up inside the old metal worker's building." Said Mesfin. "I promise you it'll be safe....No one will touch anything in may contain."

Akiva believed him, there was something about the manager's voice. Mesfin meant Prince, or sometimes Ruler; in a country where the meaning of names was taken seriously. His ancestors had probably once ruled the entire province.

"I need a shower and a change of clothes." Said Sophia. "Can someone show me where I'm sleeping?"

"Yes, of course." Said Mesfin.

The manager called a name really quickly and a young man was there. There would be plenty of time to get to know everyone's name. The young man took them upstairs one floor and led them to a corridor that went from one side of the building to the other.

"Sophia Lombardi is in this room." Said the man.

He handed her a key on a plastic fob, but lost a few points. Not one mention about letting them know if there was anything wrong with her room. Being fair though, it was a walled compound on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, not a hotel.

"Gen Debré has been given this room."

He caught a glimpse as Gen went into her room and it looked spacious and clean. Akiva hoped his room was just as nice.

"Just me left." Said Akiva.

"You're in this room."

His bags were already there and the windows had been opened to freshen the air. No aircon; it was going to get hot in there and perhaps a little sticky. The room was spacious though, the bed large

and comfortable looking. There was even a large, wide ceiling fan, to keep the room cooler. On the whole, Akiva preferred it to a room in one of the swanky hotels in the heart of the city.

“Beautiful.....I think I’m going to like it here.” He muttered.

Nothing is ever perfect, the water in the shower was hot, but it came out in little more than a dribble. In a way, it was nice to have something to moan about, when everything else was so good. By the time he found the dining room, the other two were already there.

“Akiva.....About time.” Said Gen. “I saved you some of the starter.....It’s delicious.”

It was, as were the other three local dishes. He hadn’t been expecting anything as elaborate as a four course meal. The food was amazing, especially as one of the staff had cooked it for them. No booze, which could be easily corrected.

“Surely this isn’t a dry house ?” Asked Akiva. “I’d love a couple of beers to wash the food down with.”

One of the very attentive staff was about to get beer, but Gen held up her hand to stop him.

“Any other night, but not tonight.” Said Gen. “An expert is needed to read the alchemical formulas; some of it is in a long dead language. We also need to get everything out of the van and onto shelves. Nathalie has put an expert on a plane; he’ll be with us in the morning. By then, we need to know what we have from the laboratory and where we’ve put it.”

“Fair enough, a sober night it is.” Said Akiva. “Do we have a name for this expert ?”

“Maximillian Romero, a native of Bolivia.” Said Gen. “He likes to be called Max.”

“Oh.....Him !” Said Sophia.

~ ~

Tim knew that Laura had a few secret lairs in various locations; it seemed to be instinctive to vampires. He himself had been wondering about finding somewhere. A clean dry hole in the ground would do, but something slightly better than that was preferred. A secret place that few, if any other people knew about. A place to store precious things, with a bed in a corner in case the lair was needed as a refuge. So far Tim hadn’t chosen anywhere, but Laura had a few of them, mainly dotted about south east England. It seemed it wasn’t only your first love you never forgot. Laura had used her Gudara to bring them to her very first Lair; when she was still almost a new born vampire.

“Ideally I’d now be giving the codex and journal of Elias Albrecht to Nathalie.” Said Laura. “But a promise is a promise and I gave Thomas my word.”

There had been a conversation about using the apartment in Brittany for the invocation, but it seemed that a summoning might be a little dangerous; whereas an invocation might be crazy; leaning towards suicidal. So dangerous that others in the Silver Dawn headquarters might be at risk. Tim was just nodding and carrying whatever he was asked to carry.

“Will there be any risk to the people above us ?” Asked Adelaide.

“I doubt it, we’re quite deep underground and the stone walls are thick.” Said Laura.

The lair was below a stately home not that far from London; Laura had driven there before being given her Gudara. Electric light hooked up to the supply above, the lair really was quite comfortable. Tim had been there a few times, usually for them to have sex on the bed in the corner.

“Are you alright, Tim ?” Asked Adelaide. “You’ve hardly said a word since we’ve been here.”

“I’m still getting my head around the difference between a summoning and an invocation.” He said “Summon Choronzon and we could place him inside a locked circle.” Said Laura. “An invocation is inviting him here and he can do what he likes. Thomas says it needs to be an invocation.”

“I’d have worded it differently, but that just about covers it.” Said Adelaide.

The essence of Old Thomas was there, preparing himself for the big event. Eyes closed, he looked to be taking a very long nap. Laura said he was meditating to gain strength for when he was either granted some sort of renewed life, or tossed into the Abyss by Choronzon. There was still some argument about whether Choronzon was a demon, or a deity.

"We need you now, Thomas." Said Laura.

"Yes, yes.....Leave me alone until the last possible moment." Muttered Thomas.

"It is the last moment." Said Laura.

Thomas could have read the invocation from the codex without their help. He'd needed them to help remove it from the archive of the Albrechts. There were also various items required for the invocation, which he couldn't carry in his current nebulous form. Salt mainly, they'd needed many heavy bags of salt. There was a deep line of salt right around the inside of the lair. Laura had jammed the door shut a long time before, but they'd still put huge amounts of salt across the threshold. Tim hadn't asked for an explanation. He just wanted to get the whole thing over with.

"Fine, where do you want me ?" Asked Thomas.

"Here.....Inside the circle of Jasmine flowers." Said Laura.

Fresh Jasmine flowers had been an issue, but Laura had used her Gudara for a quick trip to hillside in Afghanistan; where she'd remembered seeing them. That had been only one strange trip to obtain items for the invocation.

"The flowers are only for purification." Said Adelaide. "According to the codex, Choronzon won't be angered by them."

"Jasmine, the scent of the Gods." Said Thomas. "Yes, I can understand that."

A ring of salt around Thomas next, which Tim poured from a huge sack of rock salt. Why so much salt ? It seemed the codex recommended it; just in case something nasty decided to arrive in the wake of Choronzon. Laura admitted some of it was guesswork. Thomas was the only real expert and he was still stood half in the world of the living and half in the realm of the dead.

"I'll hold the codex up so that you can read the words." Said Adelaide.

"I need a witness, someone to say I'm worthy." Said Thomas.

"You never mentioned that before." Said Laura.

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

"You'll be putting yourself in mortal danger." Said Adelaide.

"My choice and I want to do it." Said Tim. "Hold up the codex and let Thomas say the words."

Tim wasn't particularly brave, or at least he didn't think he was. They'd made a promise to Thomas and now was the time to fulfil that promise. Laura had given her word and Tim didn't want her telling a deity what a nice guy Thomas was; when they all knew he wasn't. If anyone was going to suffer the wrath of Choronzon, it was going to be him. Adelaide held the codex up in front of Thomas.

"Read the words, Thomas." Said Laura. "Let's get this over with, no matter how it might end up." Thomas actually cleared his throat, which was something Tim thought was impossible for a wraith like being.

"Choronzon, dweller of the Abyss.....I invoke you....." Began Old Thomas.

~ ~