

Clara Copley

(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 4 – The Occultists

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~ Discussing battle plans in the kitchen ~

Laura had told her the Van Helsings were in another part of the borough the day before, which was good news. There was always the slight chance that one of the police would get a feeling about one of them, it had happened before. An intelligent cop with far too much curiosity.....But it seemed they were finished with that part of Hornsey.

“To be honest, they all think something weird is going on.” Said Noah. “Expected to use antique weapons against an unknown enemy. And you can’t live in this house without seeing something. Niña needs to be more careful about what she says, but you know that. Don’t worry though, the lads will be loyal and stand beside you, no matter what happens.”

The lads, as Noah called them, had been in the house for the best part of three weeks. So far, there had been no attack on the house, or any further attempts to test the strength of the windows. As for her son, Justin Ned Atherton ? The boy was thriving; even his skin had lost the greyness and was now a healthy pink; well, healthy for a normal human.

“I’m paying them well, Noah.” Said Clara. “Remind them of that, if they get a little too curious. Are they happy, Noah ? I noticed they’ve spread out, bed rolls all over the house.”

“They’re happy enough.....All of them like Niña’s cooking and Thai takeaways.” Said Noah. “Nipper had them spread out to sleep.....Safer for when the attack comes. They’re even getting used to carrying swords and axes.”

Nipper seemed to be their leader and all of them had worked together before. They’d guarded a hotel in the midlands a month or so before, while restoration work was in progress. Before that, Nipper mentioned close personal guarding of a celebrity who’d thumped his mistress.

“Not exactly the SAS, but enough work to keep the lights on.” Nipper had told her.

They’d been allowed to keep their personal phones, on the condition that everyone, even their wives, were given a fake story about where they were. They all used handles and besides Nipper, there was a Monty and a Lucky. The biggest out of the bunch was a Scott named.....Of course they called him Scotty, it was inevitable. That just left a Londoner called Bungle for some reason and a tall thin man called Baker. It seemed that when there was no Niña to cook for them, Baker was a dab hand at cooking just about anything.

“If you’re not worried about what it tastes like.” Noah had told her.

Baker looked Asian, while Bungle and Lucky seemed born of West Indian parents. The remainder were white. Not that Clara cared where any of them came from, or their ancestors. If they were alright to fight for the British Army, they were good enough for her.

Not a bad bunch and the handles were for their protection, rather than client confidentiality. Guard someone the public don't care for and they might turn up on your doorstep. Nipper blamed it on social media, but he seemed to blame everything on Facebook and Twitter.

"They'll need the occasional time somewhere else, I know that." Said Clara. "Patsy has her days in the office and Mabina is on nights with her local hospital. Not everyone will be here when we're attacked, but I need to know who is here. I've asked Niña to keep a list for me."

"Laura is still running drills at four in the morning, every morning." Said Noah.

"Can't hurt.....If they're all ready to fight at four, they're not going to be fast asleep at three, or half three." Said Clara. "It's a good idea and keeps us on our toes."

"Did Laura have any luck finding out who might be about to attack?" Asked Noah.

"It seems there are several groups who'd like to abduct my child." Said Clara. "Not that anyone seems certain which group are likely to follow up on checking out our windows. Ahhhh, you jogged my memory, Noah. The Silver Dawn did confirm that my missed heartbeats at the birth of Justin, are significant. He was born of a vampire and born of the dead. It's huge, important and definitely one for the history books."

"Why?" Asked Noah. "What does it mean?"

"Ahhhh..... Sadly, they're not sure, but it will be huge."

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~ The attack ~

Laura had been almost right about the time, but it was Niña who'd been the first to see the attackers. She'd been awake of course, for one of Laura's damned drills. Three thirty on a Friday morning and as she was awake, Niña looked over the screens on the wall. There was no sound on the screen, no microphones. But the levering open of the window at the rear of the house, had probably been fairly quiet. Not just that window, one in the lounge was being worked on with a crowbar. Not shadows these attackers, they looked human. Cloaks and hoods of course, but Niña was a vampire and knew a human when she saw one. It had begun, the attack they'd been waiting for. Niña noticed a third window being fiddled with, this time in the kitchen.

"Crap.....They mean business." She muttered.

There were speakers in a few places in the house, though Niña wasn't about to start yelling that there was an attack. The people breaking in would hear that. The speakers were never loud enough to annoy the neighbours, but everyone on their side would hear the tune and know what it meant. Niña had never heard of Frank Sinatra, which was hardly surprising. Clara had told her though, that if his song 'My Way,' was played, everyone would know the Visigoths were at the gates. Niña pressed a button and heard.....

'Regrets, I've had a few, but then again, too few to mention.....'

Laura seemed to like lounging on the sofa, while watching Netflix and eating pizza with Tim. When she wanted to, the young vampire could move like the wind. She was there in about three seconds and looking at the screens.

"Kitchen, lounge and the rear of the house." Said Niña. "They're attacking everywhere at the same time."

"Have you seen anything.....Unnatural out there?" Asked Laura.

"No, just the humans.....I can feel their heartbeats now." Said Niña.

"You're our reserve, Niña." Said Laura. "Get ready, but stay in here unless they find you. Then take care of the enemy in any way you like."

Laura had gone and that song she'd never heard of until Clara had told her about it, was still playing in every room in the house.

'And now, the end is near, and so I face the final curtain.....'

A bit morbid, but she was beginning to like the sound of Sinatra's voice. There was a scream from outside in the lounge and one of the human heartbeats, stopped beating. Good, Laura was dealing with the problem in that part of the house. Niña picked up an axe Laura had given her. It had once been used by a legendary hero of ancient Egypt. According to Laura, it would easily slice their enemies in two, even if they weren't human. Niña hugged the axe and waited.

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~ Defending the downstairs ~

Tim Chance knew where the sword of Se-Osiris had been hidden. He moved two cushions on an armchair and picked it up. No constant rage, the blade was more subtle than that. It gave whoever wielded it, feelings of bravery and anger, but only when needed. No extra strength or skill with a sword, but if he needed it; Tim would have the bravery of a legendary warrior and the rage of a Viking Berserker. Tim heard a scream and turned, just in time to see Laura rip out a woman's throat, with her vampire fangs.

"I got the one in the kitchen." Shouted Laura. "They're opening the window behind you."

Laura was gone, heading towards the rear of the house. When the lounge window opened, a huge mountain of a man clambered inside. He was wearing robes and had a large wooden club in his hands. It seemed the enemy were no keener on using guns around the special child, than they were. There was an embroidered symbol on the robes, just a few lines in gold thread. It could have meant anything, but Tim recognised it.

"You're with the Psochic Order." Said Tim. "You were on our side.....I thought you still were."

An ancient order of occultists, probably the oldest such order on the planet. In all fairness, Laura had betrayed them when she gone to work for the Silver Dawn. A memory surfaced, of Laura using a powerful hunting rifle to shoot several members of the Psochic Order. They'd been attacking a meeting of the Silver Dawn in the old Greenwich Naval College. Tell someone who thinks they're anonymous that you recognise them.....It seemed to stop the huge man in his tracks.

"You bastards killed Sam Isaacs, head of our order." Yelled the man.

Had they? It had been a long time ago and who sided with whom, had become more than a little complicated. Tim decided attack was the best method of defence. He swung his blade at the man in robes and missed.....It happened, but not that often.

"Bastard." Yelled the man.

The wooden club was larger than a baseball bat and probably heavier. It sounded heavy, as it went past Tim's ear with a whoosh of air. Tim stepped back and his left heel found the edge of the coffee table. It really didn't seem to be his night, as the occultist raised his club.

"Hey.....Fucker." Yelled Bungle.

Bungle was a Londoner, who seemed to invent cockney rhyming slang as he went along. It was rumoured that he and Niña were forming an attachment. Tim knew the girl might look about nineteen, but was really much older. She was definitely capable of defending her own honour, if it came to it. Bungle swung a strange ball and chain device, which collided with the occultist's shoulder. The man was spun around by the blow and was now facing Bungle.

"Thank you, Bungle." Said Tim.

Tim didn't feel bound by any code of fighting, or rules of war. It was now two against one, but it was all about making sure a tiny baby came to no harm. No warning, there were no rules of chivalry

involved in defending the ground floor of the house. Tim saw an opening. He stabbed deep with his blade, several times, into the body of the Psochic. No one was ever really dead before hitting the ground, at least not in a fight with antique edged weapons. The man fell down and gurgled blood out of his mouth. He probably died a few minutes after Tim had stabbed him.

"Them or us.....Them or us." Said Bungle. "I'll check the kitchen; a few seemed to be coming from there."

There was a face at the open window and Tim was in no mood to back away. The sword he carried had seen a need and was making him brave and rather annoyed.

"Yeah.....Come on then." Yelled Tim.

The face backed away into the night. Could it really be that easy ? Tim knew it wasn't going to be that easy, as the face came back, accompanied by two others. He stabbed at an arm in the dark and was rewarded with a yell of pain. The faces backed away and something else was coming through the window. A shadow, something unnatural as Laura called them; a creature of the darkness. Tim had a good sword, but had no idea if it would hurt the shadow.

"You next huh ? Come on then." Shouted Tim.

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~ Defending the first landing ~

"Is no one doing anything down there ?" Muttered Noah.

He was hiding behind two wardrobes, with a hefty looking war hammer in his hands. He couldn't pronounce the name of the weapon he carried, but it felt good in his hands, as if the hammer was an old friend. He hadn't really believed in enchanted weapons, until he'd picked up that hammer. Through a gap in the wardrobes, he could see two men in robes, both of them coming towards him. They looked agitated, definitely agitated. Maybe they'd had a run in with Laura ? She was supposed to be down there, somewhere. Not that she'd stopped the two in front of him. Noah stepped out from behind his hide made of wardrobes.

"Where do you think you're going ?" Asked Noah.

The one closest to him was fast, wickedly fast. He had a knife that looked so small, almost a joke. Noah didn't laugh as it carved a deep line over the back of his left hand. It instantly felt wrong, like a cut that wasn't normal. Noah had a lot of old scars; it came with the job and his lifestyle. No cut had ever felt like the wound on his hand and it was gushing blood. Maybe the enemy had their own enchanted weapons ? Even if he was bleeding to death, there were still enemy occultists to fight. Noah felt vulnerable, which as a rare sensation. Feeling vulnerable made him merciless. He leapt forward and hit the closest enemy with his war hammer; straight in the face, with enough force to leave nothing but a few bones, sinews and the stump of a neck. A victory, but there was one remaining occultist and the wound on Noah's hand, showed no signs of clotting, or even slowing down.

"I may die today, but you'll join me in hell." Said Noah.

The second occultist was a woman, not a man. Hard to see in the darkened hallway, with her dressed in robes. It was the eye makeup that gave her away. Who wears makeup to a battle ? Obviously some occultists did. Just for a second, her gender made Noah hesitate. She too had one of the blades that still might leave him dead from bleeding out. As her blade went towards his chest, the woman gasped.

"Sorry, I've been chasing her from the kitchen." Said Laura.

Laura seemed to prefer her own strength and fangs, to any of the Weapons of the Fallen. She bit the woman from behind, tearing out several of her neck vertebra. She probably was dead before her body hit the ground.

"Do you know anything about their weapons, Laura ?" Asked Noah. "This cut on my hand seems to be bleeding worse than a torn carotid artery. I'm feeling a bit.....It needs to stop bleeding."

"Horus removed most of my abilities, but not all." Said Laura. "I still know much of the Egyptian book of the dead and.....Removing that from my mind seems beyond even a deity."

"Book of the dead.....That doesn't sound encouraging." Said Noah.

"It's the book with all the best rituals and summonings." Said Laura. "Come into my room, we need a few moments of relative peace and tranquillity."

"But other occultists might come up the stairs." Said Noah.

"And you can't fight them if you're dead." Said Laura. "Come on, it won't take long, but I need to concentrate. Besides, Clara is hardly helpless."

Noah followed Laura into the bedroom she shared with Tim. It was like a jumble sale had decided to use the room as a warehouse. Discarded clothes everywhere, with what looked like a large revolver on the bedside table.

"Don't mention the gun to Clara, it's there as a last resort." Said Laura. "Come here and sit on the bed.....Yes, on top of my discarded jeans and T shirts."

Noah kept still as Laura grabbed his still bleeding hand. As the vampire began to recite some kind of ritual, she seemed to physically change. Gone was the young woman; she began to look very old and her skin was the colour of coffee with no cream. Despite her still wearing modern clothes, Noah had the feeling the woman holding his hand was incredibly ancient.

"Keep still." Said Laura.

"Sorry."

He was nervous; it wasn't every day that a vampire spoke aloud, an incantation from the book of the dead. Laura actually kissed his hand and tasted his blood. A few more words in a language he didn't understand and his hand felt normal again.

"It's stopped bleeding."

"That, Noah.....Was what I intended." Said Laura. "I'm now going back to help Tim. He's incredibly brave, but I need to check. He's sometimes too courageous for his own good. If you get cut again by an occultist's blade, come and find me."

"Thank you.....I'll forget seeing the gun."

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~ Monty in the nursery ~

Daniel was somewhere in the Midlands, picking up various test results on her and her child. Patsy wasn't there either, though Clara had called and left a message on her phone.

"Patsy.....We're playing Sinatra." Which Patsy would understand.

People tended to underestimate Patsy, especially the other vampires. Clara knew she was worth having around in a fight. She'd seen her aim a gun straight into the face of an enemy, and then pulling the trigger twice. Monty was with her, carrying a large gold coloured battle axe. Clara had no idea what enchantment the axe might carry, that was Laura's area of expertise. Nipper had chosen Monty as a replacement for Daniel, to guard the nursery. He was large and muscular, but no real replacement for a brutal vampire like Daniel.

"So, why the name Monty ?" Asked Clara. "Has it any significance."

Monty wore an army beret all the time; he even seemed to sleep in his bedroll, with the beret still perched on his head. He was pointing at it, as if the answer was obvious.

"Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery.....Some say I look like him." Said Monty.

Unlike Monty, Clara had been through the Second World War, she'd even come close to being bombed in.....Gravesend; yes it had been in Gravesend. She had no idea what the field marshal had looked like, but decided to be kind.

"Yes, of course.....I can see it now." Said Clara.

Clara was sat on the edge of the hospital style bed in the nursery, which she still slept on most nights. She was ready to use any, and all means to defend her son. Not just her son, he was all she had left of Simon, his father. Justin was fast asleep in his crib. He'd grown since his birth and put on quite a bit of weight.

"A healthy, thriving child." Mabina had told her.

"Don't worry.....I won't let anyone hurt him." Said Monty.

It would have been better if Daniel had been there, but Clara briefly touched Monty's arm and thanked him. Maybe not her first choice of guard for her son, but he was willing to risk his own life to protect the sleeping child.

"That's an unusual weapon you've got there." Said Monty.

"It's my Yemeni Janbiya; I've had it for years."

It had been in a box in the loft and she'd had Niña go up there and find it. A long perfectly balanced, curved blade. No enchantments on it, but Clara had learned how to use it through experience; many centuries of experience.

"Looks impressive."

"The right angle and you can decapitate an enemy with a single blow." Said Clara.

Wonderful, the guy who thought he looked like a long dead field marshal was giving her a disbelieving snigger. He might actually see her do it, if he survived an attack by the occultists coming over the flat roof from the rear of the house.

"I think we forgot the flat roof." Said Clara. "Several of them will be here soon, outside the nursery window. Be prepared Monty, there are at least five occultists, maybe six."

"Are you sure ? How do you know ?"

"Trust me, Monty.....I know."

Clara moved her son out of his crib and into his carry cot. He was still fast asleep, as she placed the cot inside a strong, lockable cupboard. Two blankets over the top of the cot to stop any debris from hitting him and she locked the door.

"Our one purpose, Monty.....No bad guys get to open that cupboard." Said Clara.

There was a crash in the corridor and the door swung open. There was Noah, stood over the body of one of the black robed occultists. Both Noah and his war hammer were fairly bloody.

"Just in time, they're coming over the flat roof." Said Clara. "Justin is locked away in the cupboard."

The three of them got in a line, in front of where she'd left her son. Noah was looking at the corridor, while she and Monty watched the window. They didn't have long to wait, until the entire window frame seemed to fall away, into the garden below. It had been on Simon's list of rainy day jobs.....Getting a stronger window for the upstairs back bedroom.

"Here we go." Said Monty.

Ronnie was in the house somewhere, probably taking on at least two of the bad guys on her own. Actually, Hacker Jim would be with her of course. They'd all be fighting for their lives in different parts of the building. Short of a miracle, the life of her son relied on the three of them stood in the

nursery. As the first occultist came through the hole where the window had been, Clara got her first good look at the insignia they all had on their robes.

"They're Psochics.....Members of the Psochic order." Said Clara.

Useless information really, meaningless to the two humans who stood beside her. Clara remembered being a human, before she'd been turned. So much bravery and hope, locked inside such a fragile body.

"First one is mine.....I saw him first." Yelled Clara.

As if to make a point to Monty, Clara stepped slightly to one side. She used her Janbiya with a backhand stroke and removed the guy's head with a single stroke. His severed head actually bounced twice and rolled into the hallway. Monty gave some kind of battle cry, before running at the enemy.

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~ Not a miracle, just Patsy ~

Mabina dropping everything at work to be there, would have been a miracle. Clara knew Mabina had been suspended once for leaving a busy ward to help her. There was her name on the list, on the wall next to the screens in the room under the stairs.

'Mabina.....Do not disturb when working nights.'

So no one had called her, in the same way that no one had sent a text to Daniel's phone. One thing was distance of course. Mabina was in the Fulham area, while Daniel was just south of Dudley in the Midlands. Neither of them was close enough to Hornsey, to be of any help. Patsy arriving wasn't a miracle; she had been sent the Sinatra text, which she understood. She hadn't arrived empty handed; she'd brought an expensive target bow, complete with a quiver full of arrows. Patsy was good with a bow, very good. If she killed any of the attackers in the Hornsey house that night, they wouldn't be the first lives she'd ended with her bow. Patsy looked up at the house from the street and it looked so quiet, so normal.....

"Clara is as bad as Simon." Patsy muttered. "Everything always ends up as a fight with someone."

She had her own keys to the doors, and the French windows at the back of the house. The front door was probably unwise, but Patsy got her bow ready to use and opened the front door. There was something playing on the TV in the lounge, though she couldn't make out the words. The door creaked a little as she closed it, but no one came to see who had arrived. The body wasn't far from the door.

"Oh hell.....Everyone liked Bungle." Patsy mumbled. "Niña will go ballistic."

Niña had been getting friendly with Bungle and everyone liked the Londoner. To see him, hacked and slashed until he was just about unrecognisable.....There had to be some payback for that. Niña was probably higher up in the house, more than likely guarding the nursery. On the way to the stairs, Patsy opened the cupboard under the stairs. There was Niña, hitting a man in robes. It looked as though the robed enemy, was already dead.

"What are you doing ?" Asked Patsy. "He's dead and won't get any deader."

"This is him, the bastard who killed Bungle." Said Niña. "I'm going to beat him until his own mother wouldn't recognise the remains."

She was certainly thumping the body hard enough to achieve her goal. Laura had once told her that only vampires could hit hard enough, for long enough to effectively liquefy a body. Once vampires hated someone, they held one hell of a grudge.

"He's dead, Niña." Said Patsy. "Hopefully Clara and Justin are still alive. Leave the dead alone, the living need our help."

"Fine, but I'm coming back to finish the job with this one." Said Niña. "He stabbed Bungle over a hundred times; I can show you every wound."

One final blow that knocked the chair over and left the dead occultist on the floor. Niña was with her after that, as they headed up the stairs. Patsy's bow was an expensive competition bow, which could quickly fire four arrows, but it was a complicated and fragile affair; never intended for battle.

"Slow down, Niña." Hissed Patsy. "If I can get two or three of them as we get there, it might keep us alive."

The arrows seemed to hang off the bow, but they could be strung and fired very quickly. Patsy nodded at Niña and both of them ran up the rest of the stairs. There were two dead black robed occultists on the landing and rather mysteriously, a severed head. There was also one very much alive woman in robes. She was holding up a glowing left hand and seemed to be about to hurl some kind of dark magic at them.

"Oh no you don't !" Yelled Patsy.

Two arrows to be sure, though the first one would have done the job. The first arrow pierced the woman's throat and was sticking out of the side of her neck; as she drowned in her own blood. Laura always said better them than us, but sometimes Patsy felt sorry for those she killed in battle. The second arrow ended up in the chest of the dead female occultist.

"They must be coming over the flat roof." Said Niña. "I knew we were leaving a back door wide open. No one listens, until it's too late."

Patsy knew that Clara hadn't set a budget for improving the defences of the house. If Niña had made that much noise about it; there would have been bullet proof windows fitted in the nursery; probably made of Plexiglas. If it was good enough to protect the Pope, it was good enough to protect baby Justin. Patsy was beginning to realise that when it suited her; Niña embellished the truth, often by quite a lot.

Patsy had her bow ready and Niña had a long thin blade in her hand, as they entered the nursery. They were just in time to see Clara kill the last of the attackers. A male in the usual dark robes, her Janbiya had had just sliced off most of the right side of his chest.

"Ah, Niña arrives.....When the job is done." Said Noah.

"Have respect.....It's like hell downstairs." Said Patsy. "And one of the bastards killed Bungle."

"Oh, not Bungle.....I thought he'd survive." Said Clara.

The floor seemed covered in the dead, nearly all of them dressed in black robes. Noah was pulling at Monty, who was leaned up against the far wall of the nursery.

"I thought he'd be alright." Said Noah. "It's those small daggers the Psochics use.....Wicked things, the wound never heals and bleeds like fuck."

"Not Monty too." Said Clara.

Noah seemed to be checking for a pulse, before looking up and shaking his head. It seemed Monty really was dead. As if there wasn't enough bad news, Ronnie arrived, covered in blood and crying. Ronnie crying; Patsy had never seen her do that before. She hadn't thought Veronica Neophytou could cry. Niña hugged her.....She'd have known of course, her vampire senses might even have felt his heart stop beating.

"I'm so sorry, Ronnie." Said Niña. "We'll get revenge on the bastards who killed him."

Patsy could guess who Ronnie was crying about, but it only felt real after Clara said it.

"Jim Weaver.....I can hardly believe he's dead." Said Clara. "We'll mourn our dead and strengthen the house; I know some people who can cover the building in magical wards. Once we've done that, we will seek out the Psochics. Trust me, they will be destroyed."

"Jim seemed indestructible." Muttered Patsy.

A few nodding heads and a mutter of agreement. It had occurred to Patsy; Jim, Monty and Bungle.....They were all human. Hardly surprising that the fragile humans had died, while the vampires had come out of it; almost unscathed. It was making her think though; it was definitely something to ponder on.

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~ Clara goes visiting ~

No baking a cake, or taking a casserole in a Pyrex dish, but Clara thought it was time to visit their neighbours. The occupants of the Hornsey house had always believed in the great British tradition, of knowing almost nothing about their neighbours. Engagement of any kind was avoided, though they did send out Christmas cards. There had been noises though and an entire window frame lying against the edge of the pond in the back garden. Mercifully no one had called the Van Helsings, but there had been an unreasonable amount of noise. Clara wasn't stupid and she'd been born in a small English village at about the time Henry VIII was on the throne. Even then, unduly annoying your neighbours was a fairly serious offence. Whole families had been driven out of the village for what would now be described as antisocial behaviour. Clara had come up with a plausible excuse for being a bad neighbour and picked up Justin. Her reputation in the street was along the lines of being a woman of mystery. Fine for most of the time, but with a baby in her arms.....

"Oh, he's adorable." Said Mrs Johar.

Some of the adorable would rub off onto Clara. She understood village life and their street in Hornsey, was their village. The woman of mystery had now become the new mother with an adorable son.

"I came to apologise about the noise last night." Said Clara. "We had damage from the storm, I think everyone did."

"Yes, we had a few missing roof tiles." Said Amina Johar.

"The builders seemed alright and we should have checked." Said Clara. "Shoddy work I'm afraid and last night.....Some of the windows they were supposed to have fixed; came crashing down into our back garden. Scared my poor Justin, he cried for hours."

"Oh, the poor thing.....Bad builders are a curse." Said Amina.

"I can't apologise enough."

"Not a problem.....You're usually so quiet."

A lot more grovelling and a hint that Clara was now a single mother. Clara didn't think she'd overdone it and she was sure that Amina Johar was now a friend. Another two close neighbours and one who was known to be a little nosey. By the time Clara opened her own front door and went inside, her jaw was hurting from all the smiling at neighbours; she'd be hard put to recognise in a crowd. It was draining, far worse than fighting off occultists. Mabina was in the lounge, wrapping Hacker Jim's body in plastic sheeting.

"How did it go?" Asked Mabina.

"I used my baby to make them like me and blamed fictitious builders for the noise.....They believed me. I had Justin in my arms and they swallowed the lot. Babies should be officially registered as secret weapons.....Was Ronnie alright about us disposing of Jim?"

"Alright.....I don't think the girl will ever be alright again." Said Mabina. "They seemed such an unlikely couple. Anyway, she knew there was no alternative. He rarely saw anyone apart from her and a few of his nerdy friends. Just the sort to go missing and never be seen again."

Nipper had agreed to look after the bodies of Bungle and Monty, though neither of them would get a funeral, surrounded by grieving relatives. Disposed of somewhere, with a cash settlement as a sweetener to any long term partner they might have. Run to the cop and there was no sweetener. It sounded harsh, but they'd lived fairly tough, harsh lives. Nipper had even volunteered to dispose of the dead occultists, for a fairly reasonable price. That left Clara with just Jim to worry about.

"The place doesn't look too bad." Said Clara. "Some of the wooden floors need a serious clean. A few rugs need replacing, but on the whole....It could have been worse."

Justin was fussing a bit in her arms; he seemed to know if he wasn't the centre of attention. Clara kissed her son's cheek and he instantly settled down. Laura said Justin was either destined for a life as a pop star, or a politician.

"Have you decided what to do with Jim." Said Mabina. "We can't dump him down a hole in the ground. Try that and Ronnie will go crazy."

"Nor can we bury him in a nice quiet churchyard, with a beautiful headstone over his grave." Said Clara.

"So, what are you going to do with Jim's body." Asked Ronnie.

Clara hadn't seen her, or detected her heartbeat, which was unusual. She was blaming those kinds of events on baby brain. She'd decided it had to affect humans and vampires. It was strange that Ronnie would want to see her dead lover, wrapped up in several layers of plastic.

"I'm still deciding, but it will be respectful and dignified." Said Clara. "Trust me Ronnie, I thought too much of Jim to simply dump him in a shallow grave in Epping Forest. He died protecting my son.....You need to trust me, Ronnie. Whatever I decide, will happen tomorrow."

"Fine, I'll trust you." Said Ronnie.

Ronnie stomped out of the room and there was a crash as she let the front door slam behind her.

"That.....Was quite a promise you made to her." Said Mabina.

"I know.....And I intend to keep it."

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~ A dignified farewell for Hacker Jim ~

Daniel was there, Clara had been worried he might miss their group farewell to Jim Weaver, the eccentric IT guy from Cleckheaton. He'd been trying to tell her about the test results on her breast milk, but her mind was elsewhere and she had to concentrate on driving.

".....Oh no, not just blood in the milk you feed Justin. There are some very strange compounds too. Some aren't normal to any mammalian life and even vampires are mammals, of a kind."

"Can we talk later ?" Asked Clara. "I am excited by what you found, but today.....It has to be a hundred percent about Jim. I owe that to Ronnie."

"Yes of course, we can talk about it later." Said Daniel.

There were about eight of them; Clara had given up trying to be precise. All in three cars, which meant no one was crushed in a corner of a back seat; and there was room for Justin in his carry cot. It wasn't going to be a quick journey to Essex, not with her baby in the car. Not one mile per hour over the speed limit; which seemed apt for what was after all, a funeral procession. Jim's plastic wrapped body was in the trunk of Mabina's expensive and flashy Mercedes. Clara's humble Peugeot hatchback was in the front of course, as no one was quite sure where they were going.

"How did you pull off a church funeral ?" Asked Daniel.

"Don't worry, we won't burst into flames.....It's deconsecrated."

"Now I really am curious." Said Daniel.

"We'll be there soon." Said Clara.

Out along the A12, with most of the road signs pointing at Colchester, or even Harwich. Clara had been there before; she knew where to turn off the main road. It was a sunny day and the village looked quite picturesque, almost as it must have looked for hundreds of years. No parking near the ruined church, they were there to do something illegal and probably considered to be sacrilegious. Clara parked by the side of a country lane, where they could all see the collapsed church steeple and walls covered in ivy. Everyone looked curious, especially Ronnie.

"Well, what do you think, Ronnie.....Will it do ?" Asked Clara.

"Yes, it's beautiful.....I was expecting some dreadful flooded quarry." Said Ronnie.

"Deconsecrated and the graveyard was emptied of the dead." Said Clara. "Not a church now, not really. No guarantees Jim will be left in peace, but I think he will be. Local villagers tend to respect their old places of worship."

"It's beautiful.....Perfect." Said Laura. "How did you find it ?"

"By accident, many years ago." Said Clara. "Being honest.....It was where I'd intended to bury Simon, when he was once close to death."

Clara gave an unintended look at Mabina, whose blade had nearly removed Simon from the world of the living.

"If you thought it was good enough for Simon...It is perfect." Said Ronnie. "What do we do now.....Do we have to dig a grave ?"

"A last job for Nippy....And myself." Sais Noah. "We came last night and dug a grave for Jim. It's up against the old east wall of the church. Covered in a tarpaulin, filling it in shouldn't be hard work." A shallow grave that could be easily hidden, had been Clara's instructions. Not that she wanted Ronnie to hear that. Shallow grave had too many bad associations with the name. Unwanted offspring killed and buried on a moonless night; even suicides had once been interred in a shallow grave near a crossroads. Once Jim's body was in the grave, they all took turns in using a shovel to cover him with earth.

"Can I come back here ?" Asked Ronnie. "I should have brought flowers."

"No flowers, the grave has to be hidden." Said Clara. "You can come here though, as often as you want. It is officially a ruin and no one will mind you being here."

Noah was good at adding a few finishing touches, in the way of a few dead bushes and some broken bricks from the church wall. The finished grave merged into the ruined east wall of the church and it had effectively vanished.

"No one will disturb him, I'm sure of it." Said Clara. "Someone should say a few words.....Not right to bury Jim without a few words said over him."

Daniel muttered something in Latin, which Clara didn't recognise. It sounded serious, which was probably Daniel's intent. Laura simply thanked Jim for his help over many years, while a rather bruised Tim, promised to visit his grave again. Ronnie actually knelt in front of the shallow grave and told Jim how much she'd loved him and how much she'd miss him.

".....both crazy in our own way Jim, but whatever we had.....It worked."

Noah had a last look at the grave and seemed happy that no casual dog walker would spot it. It wasn't Clara's first interment of a friend in a shallow grave. Just one winter of British weather and even she'd have trouble finding where Jim was buried. Clara picked up Justin's carry cot and wondered what was in the breast milk she was feeding him.

"Let's go home and have pizza and too much wine." Said Clara.

"And an old movie.....Maybe two old movies." Said Tim.

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