

Clara Copley

(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 25 – Words Of Power

“Adelaide was pleased that the restaurants in Paris, London and Rome; were still on the market. She'd done a little of her own digging and they weren't exactly making a fortune, but neither had they gone bust. Buying an existing restaurant made things so much easier, than buying a store, or a large shopfront. If the public were used to a certain place being a restaurant, you were already halfway there.”

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Niña had drawn and framed six pictures of Clara's long dead family. Two each of her mother and father and one of each of her sister and brother. There were profiles of a few other villagers included as part of the pictures; putting in a cameo appearance as Niña thought of it. No smoke or flames, that would turn something nostalgic into something horrific. All black and white pencil drawings on the best artist paper. Glass in the frames of course, in case Justin rubbed sticky child fingers over them. Treated with care, the pictures would last forever.

“Well, what do you think ?” Asked Niña. “I remember you mentioned putting them on the wall in the nursery.”

“They're perfect, a permanent way to remember them.” Said Clara. “Justin can get to know his grandparents, even though they've been dead for over five hundred years.”

“Are they a good likeness to your family ?” Asked Niña. “I saw them for such a small amount of time.”

In a way, Clara answered the question by the loving way she touched the picture of her mother.

“Perfect, Niña.....Perfect.” Said Clara. “Especially my mother.....You captured something about her. You really are a good artist.”

Justin said something that sounded like perfect, probably trying to repeat what his mum had said.

“See, Justin Ned Atherton agrees.” Said Clara. “They're perfect.”

It was one of those moments which made up for spending hours buying household groceries in Morrisons. Niña could feel the grin spreading across her face.

“I didn't total avoid modern technology.” Said Niña. “I took pictures of them and uploaded them to two different cloud servers.”

“I just wish there was some way to send them to Simon.” Said Clara. “He never knew them of course. They were long dead by the time we met.”

Justin gurgled and said perfect again, in a much more understandable way. The moment had passed though, it was time for Niña to inspect and sign off the alterations to the house. Yes, the builders who'd been under their feet for months, were finally leaving.

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Adelaide was pleased that the restaurants in Paris, London and Rome; were still on the market. She'd done a little of her own digging and they weren't exactly making a fortune, but neither had they gone bust. Buying an existing restaurant made things so much easier, than buying a store, or a large shopfront. If the public were used to a certain place being a restaurant, you were already halfway there. As for their disappointing financials ?

“It’s not a good time from independent restaurants.” Meredith had told her. “Few thrive, but you’ve already done wonders with the Red Rose in Jerusalem.”

Plus, there’d be a lot left in the fighting fund, even after Adelaide had bought the three existing restaurants. She’d done quite a bit of digging the first time she’d considered buying them. If she couldn’t make a success of them, she didn’t deserve the star ratings above the door in Jerusalem. Adelaide was tired, but had to call Meredith. The sooner the ball started rolling, the better.

“Adelaide, I knew you’d call today.” Said Meredith. “You’re going to buy all three of the restaurants, aren’t you ?”

She was and for a moment there was a mini-panic attack as she thought of the amount she was about to commit to. But, with a hundred million in the bank, she could afford it.

“Yes, I want all three of them.” Said Adelaide. “All the terms and conditions as before. I’ll honour all contracts of employments with the staff. We’re going to have a very busy few months, Meredith.”

“I love being busy.”

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Nathalie Aurigny was considering booking a flight to Addis Ababa, first class of course. She was even thinking of buying a private jet for the Silver Dawn, if things continued to be busy. David had said it might take a while to get the Albrecht Journal released by the Silver Dawn clerics. Then there he was with Moshe the shaman; both of them grinning from ear to ear. Nathalie quite liked Moshe, but he always seemed to have a smug attitude about something or other. David put the journal on her desk.

“We did it.” Said Moshe. “The journal is now yours to use as you see fit.”

“And we haven’t slowed down work on the Hand of Albrecht.” Added David.

Nathalie gave up any idea of going to Ethiopia. Gen had been talking about gold yields during their last phone call. It seemed there was a potential problem with dogs’ blood. As far as Nathalie could see, lead was relatively cheap and gold was staggeringly expensive. She could live with a poor yield. She was sure there’d soon be enough money in the Silver Dawn coffers to buy that private jet. First though, there was an obvious question.

“How did you do it ?” Asked Nathalie. “How did you get the journal without screwing up work on the Hand ?”

“Ahhh.....You must let me keep my little secrets.” Said Moshe.

Smug she could live with, if it was accompanied by talent. Moshe was clever enough to be forgiven most things, but refusing to answer a direct question.....Nathalie could feel herself building up to an epic putting Moshe in his place; maybe even firing him. Luckily David was there with his wisdom in how to handle such things.

“Image duplication.” Said David. “I knew Moshe was working on something and I was pretty sure it could be applied to the journal.”

“We have a clever box of tricks in the main archive room.” Said Moshe.

“You look at a book a page at a time and the box of tricks prints it out.” Said David. “It was hard work, but surprisingly easy to get a perfect copy of the journal.”

“Very hard work, I’m so tired.” Said Moshe.

Nathalie remembered signing off on the initial budget for the project. That was nearly three years ago; she even received regular reports and updates. It was nice to know the box of tricks really worked, though she assumed it had a proper name.

“Wonderful.....Who got the original journal, the clerics or me ?” Asked Nathalie.

“You got the original.” Said David. “There’s a wine stain on about page two seventy. The Image Duplicator isn’t good with thing like stains. You have the perfect stain and the clerics’ version looks nothing like a wine stain.”

Image Duplicator, that was the proper name for the box of tricks. From memory, the project to create the device hadn’t been that expensive.

“No matter what you’re both working on, you’re now both assigned to me.” Said Nathalie.

“Sounds fun.” Said Moshe.

“There is some danger in pulling words of power into reality.” Said David.

“Still sounds fun.” Said Moshe.

They knew the risks as well as she did. There were ancient texts in the journal. David and Moshe would use those to pull out the required word of power. Nathalie would then pull the word out of them and into herself. The whole process was full of risk, like taking an untested drug.

“You both know the risks.....Are you willing to do this ?” Asked Nathalie.

“And it still sounds like fun.....I’m happy to continue.” Said Moshe.

“Are you sharing ?” Asked David. “I quite fancy Taki – Strength. If we’re starting today, you could do worse than beginning with Taki.”

“Yes, I’d quite like Neru – Fire.” Said Moshe.

Nathalie hadn’t intended to start there and then, but the two men sat around her desk seemed keen. Her father had always told her to never discourage someone keen from getting on with the job. Moshe was taking a risk with Neru, as was she. Nathalie remembered seeing a man with the burn scar on his chest; twenty years after pulling Neru out of a sacred text. Still, both David and Moshe had signed a lot of personal injury and death waivers.

“We’ll start with Taki now and then Neru in the morning.” Said Nathalie. “We’ll take it a few at a time until every word of power has been pulled from the journal.”

“We learned the ancient texts.” Said David. “I’m the right hand repeater of the texts and Moshe is the left hand.”

“Then; as has been done for centuries, we’ll start with the left hand for Taki.” Said Nathalie.

Moshe had a good voice, he reminded her of a pupil of her father’s. A good voice with superb diction, she could feel power moving around her office.

“Lock the door David.” She said. “We don’t want to harm someone from office services, come to give me a pile of internal mail.”

With the door locked it was David’s turn to read what was often referred to as the right hand of the law. Not quite the diction of Moshe, but she could feel the power building with every line. As if appearing out of nowhere, there was a Taki symbol hovering a foot or so above the centre of her desk. Some called them runes, which was totally wrong. They were simply symbols for the words of power.

“Take what you need, David.” Said Nathalie.

David Huynh reached out and gripped the Taki symbol for a few seconds, before pulling it towards his own chest. As his hand touched his chest, David yelled; a serious yell of pain.

“Fuck.....That hurt.” Said David.

“Worth it, buddy.” Said Moshe. “You’ll be able to throw a sumo wrestler across the room.”

David was rubbing his chest and looking unconvinced about the advantages of being able to chuck sumo wrestlers around. He mentioned it hurting another three times, complete with obscenities.

“Here I go, wish me luck.” Said Nathalie.

“Drink of it slowly.” Said Moshe. “Let most of the power dissipate.”

“And where would be the fun in that.” She said.

Nathalie held the symbol of Taki, until it stopped glowing; actually it vanished. The power was still in her hand, which she clasped to her chest. It was agony, like being electrocuted and severely burned at the same time. Nathalie yelled and used every obscenity she could remember, which was a lot. The two men looked horror stricken, but there was nothing they could do to prevent the pain. It lasted for a good fifteen minutes.

“The pain.....It’s finally easing up.” Said Nathalie.

“Just when we’ve no sumo wrestler to chuck about.” Said Moshe.

Such a weird sense of humour, but at that moment; Nathalie could have kissed him.

“My desk.....It’s solid mahogany.” Said Nathalie.

Bought by a predecessor, the desk had taken a dozen men to move it to its current location and they’d had the use a pallet trolley. It was ludicrously heavy, a throwback to colonial days; though she was never sure whose colonies. She loved that desk though, with its carved cherubs and one or two dragons.

“Move your things; I’m going to lift the desk.” Said Nathalie.

No real idea what it weighed, she tripped the switch in her mind to use the power that was still hurting her chest. Would the Taki power run out ? Not according to all the ancient scrolls she’d read. One hand either side, Nathalie easily lifted the mahogany desk up from her office floor.

“Wow, I’m genuinely impressed.” Said David.

She let the desk down to where it had been lifted from and her muscles didn’t ache one little bit.

“Imagine what we can do with Neru.” Said Moshe.

“Back here first thing in the morning gentlemen.” Said Nathalie.

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Was it even possible to argue with gods from another world, another reality ? Akiva still didn’t understand why they were willing to give power to their alchemy, in return for blood. Blood was cheap; life was cheap if you knew where to go; which war to watch. Sadly even the blood of children wouldn’t be that hard for strange gods to acquire.

“Surely they’re not serious ?” Asked Max

“I can assure you they are.” Said Gen. “The long dead James Maynard came to an agreement with them. They agreed to accept the blood of adult humans, but the yield dropped to around seventy five percent. It’s all in Maynard’s papers, which you’re welcome to read.”

“The journal of this person and the papers of that person.” Said Akiva. “It all gives me a headache and leaves me none the wiser. Why do gods need us to give them blood ? It’s everywhere; theirs for the taking.”

“Seventy five percent is still really good.” Said Max.

“I suppose this isn’t their world.” Said Anne. “They may not be able to function properly in ours. Maybe they need us to paint their altar with blood, or they’ll waste away ? Sorry, I know that sounds crazy.”

Not that crazy, Akiva had been toying with much the same idea. He had read the Maynard papers and one particular paragraph had lodged in his mind.

“According to Maynard the gods were weak here.” Said Akiva. “After he’d given them a lot of blood, they became much stronger, and far more dangerous. As Gen mentioned, they began to hurt anyone daft enough to be alone with them.”

“As had been noted; they could visit any war zone and get blood.” Said Max.

Gen had written notes, the conundrum of blood hungry gods had obviously occurred to her. To Akiva it would be yet more ramblings from someone who was at home with such matters as gods from other worlds. Akiva felt happier with an assault rifle in his hands and an enemy who could be killed.

“Even Maynard wasn’t totally sure about this.” Said Gen. “Giving the blood seems to matter; think of it as an offering to these gods. Maynard knew they became stronger as time went on. In the end they no longer seemed to need the offerings, or the worship of his family.”

“Worship, no one mentioned worshipping these things.” Said Anne.

“Then you need to decide how much being very wealthy means to you.” Said Max. “I will have no problem worshipping them.”

“Me neither.” Said Akiva.

Gen was giving them all the dead fish look, until everyone was quiet.

“Finally.....These gods may turn on us.” Said Gen. “We need to be very careful as they’re given more and more blood. I’ll ask them to accept the blood of adults, rather than children; which I’m fairly sure they’ll accept. At the end of the day Maynard accepted that they wanted blood for reasons he probably didn’t fully understand. He provided blood because he wanted the gold.”

“How much gold did Maynard transmute ?” Asked Anne.

“A cellar full, many tons of the stuff.” Said Akiva.

“Wow, let’s get transmuting.” Said Max.

They were in a room at the back of the main building, in the hope that their conversation would be unheard by the gods of another world. Mesfin Tesfaye the compound manager entered the room, looking quite agitated. There had been a call from Nathalie, which she’d made him write down and then repeat back to her. Mesfin made a hasty retreat once he’d given Gen the note.

“No secrets, you may as well all hear the message.” Said Gen.

She did read the note herself, before making it public. Despite saying no secrets, Gen had the opportunity to only read what suited her own agenda.

“Nathalie was going to get on a plane here.” Said Gen. “As we’re doing so well, she’s leaving us to get on with the task at hand. She’s not that concerned with yield. I have been given authority to negotiate with the gods from another world. She asks that Akiva finds adult blood for the transmutation; but never the blood of children.”

Gen passed the note to him and there it was, word for word what she’d said.

“I can do that.” Said Akiva.

“Talk to these strange gods, Gen.” Said Max. “Get them to agree to the blood of adults.”

“Yes, then we can produce lots more gold.” Said Anne.

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Laura had thought their month, or so in the sun would never happen. Something always came along that was more important, more critical; always. This time it really did seem as though they were going to get six weeks at the Hamilton Princess & Beach Club, Bermuda. So expensive it seemed a sin, but it was their first sun and sand break, ever. She’d been away with Tim to some very exotic places, but they’d been working then, so it didn’t count.

“Wow, you’re really sure you don’t want me to chip in ?” Asked Ronnie, as she read the booking form.

“No, we’ve had a good year.” Said Tim.

“A lot of well-earned bonuses from the Silver Dawn.” Said Laura. “If you have a current boyfriend ? There’s still time to add him to the hotel and get him an airline ticket.”

“Tempting, it is Bermuda.....It’s just a bit too soon after Jim.” Said Ronnie.

“Yeah, I understand.” Said Laura.

“If you hook up with a hunk off a cruise ship, we won’t judge.” Said Tim.

“Oh, Tim.” Said Laura.

“No, he’s right.....If I feel the need; it might happen.” Said Ronnie.

The date was set in stone; airfares had already been paid in full. Clara had promised there’d be no asking Tim and her to cancel everything. There was Niña in the house and Mabina only a short drive away. There was even Daniel to call on if things got really tough. On top of that, there was Karkengara, the bringer of fire. Plus, Clara was a pretty tough vampire herself. It was as if Ronnie was having the same thought process.

“I feel bad leaving Clara on her own.” Said Ronnie.

“She won’t be alone.....Stop feeling guilty, she’ll be fine.” Said Laura.

“Noah will look after Clara.” Said Tim.

Yes, of course; there was Noah sleeping in the house now. Not a vampire or a human with augmented powers; but given a decent assault rifle; he could really kick ass. Laura was sure that Clara and her son would be fine.

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Karkengara; Bringer of fire, knew there had been visitors to his temple in the underworld. Clara he could sense from her lingering aura and the perfume she favoured. Justin had the smell of his mother’s blood upon his breath. Raine had also been there and as with Clara and the boy, she was welcome there. Several others were still there, minions of the Ancient Gods by the feel of them. They might not be welcome; it depended on the purpose of their visit.

“Tricky people are minions.” He muttered.

He’d once been tempted to devour a few minions, simply to discourage there unannounced visits. Nearly all of them were female though and often pretty. No huge problem with the morality of killing, it just seemed a waste to slaughter pretty females.

“Show yourselves; I can sense you’re still here.” Shouted Karkengara. “We’re not going to get anywhere if you insist on hiding.”

He’d chased a few of them out once, threatening to eat them. He’d even puffed a little fire and smoke in their general direction. All as a deterrent of course, he’d never meant the minions any real harm. They could be sensitive though.

“Sensitive and tricky people.” He muttered.

“We bring you a message from Horus.” Yelled a minion.

“Then you’d best come out and tell me the message.” Shouted Karkengara.

“Just don’t eat us.” Shouted a minion.

“Despite my threats I’ve yet to devour a minion of the gods.” Yelled Karkengara. “I’ve no intention to start today.....You’re safe here ladies; make yourselves known.”

There were about a dozen of them, all female and all in their usual lilac robes. They huddled together in front of him, as if seeking to gain protection by their numbers. Some minions were known to cast spells, but none of them had ever aimed a spell at him.

“So.....What does the mighty Horus want with me ?” Asked Karkengara.

“We are to take you to see him.” Said a minion.

It was a strange mixture of a compliment at being summoned by such a great God, but also a little bit of an insult in being sent for. The bringer of fire decided to go without any argument, mainly out of curiosity.

“Fine, take me to his throne of gold.” Said Karkengara.

The minions of the ancient gods were powerful in their own right. He’d often wondered if any group of minions had staged a revolt. If they had; he’d never heard of it and he’d been around for a very long time. Tempest had sort of resigned from the job and that was staggeringly rare.

“We’ll create a portal and move you to his presence.” Said a minion.

“Fine.....Just be gentle with my old bones.” Said Karkengara.

A flurry of lilac robes and hand gestures and he was on his way, surrounded by a purple mist. The air in the throne room of Horus made him sneeze, it always did. All that gold dust, it had to be unhealthy. No waiting, there was Horus in front of him, sitting on one of many thrones. No bird’s head, he had the head and features of a human male. He’d never fit in a chair, so the bringer of fire lay on his stomach, like the huge dragon he resembled.

“Karkengara, so good to see you.” Said Horus. “It has been a very long time since we talked.....Far too long.”

“The humans must keep you busy with their problems.” Said Karkengara.

“They do.....It’s nice to talk to someone who understands.” Said Horus.

Horus the great sky god was buttering him up, which meant he wanted something. Karkengara wasn’t part of the pantheon of old and ancient deities, but he had to tread carefully. Keeping Horus happy might well mean being left in peace for another thousand years.

“My minions tell me you had an altercation with my followers on the world of Ix-nir.”

The four armed priests in the pyramid; Karkengara knew killing their warriors in such numbers was bound to have consequences.

“They intended to kill those who are important to me.” Said Karkengara. “They do seem to be a very aggressive people.”

“Ahhhh, yes they are unreasonably aggressive.” Said Horus. “I knew it had to be something like that.”

A weird version of carrot and stick. Karkengara knew he was being buttered up for a favour and now there was a hint of a stick. He had killed several thousand warriors in the pyramid and quite a few priests. It had never occurred to him that they were the worshippers of Horus. Karkengara decided to make the offer, before the indignity of having it forced on him.

“Perhaps I can offer a service in recompense for the loss of so many followers ?” Asked Karkengara.

“A few thousand who only remembered some of my feast days.” Said Horus. “Let’s not talk of it again.....There is something though, if you’re not too busy ?”

“Never too busy to do something for the great sky god.” Said the bringer of fire.

Here it came; something punitive being made to look like a pleasant task. Or maybe a chore so boring it would drive him crazy. Too late now, he had offered. On the other hand, it might be something exciting and enjoyable; one never knew when it came to Horus.

“I am aware you know Simon Atherton, the feeder on blood.” Said Horus.

“Yes, very amiable as vampires go.” Said Karkengara. “He was in London on the timeline he was born into. Now he’s in Italy at the time of the Medici. Simon is good at getting on with others of his kind, which is very rare.”

Horus became the body of a man, with the head of a bird. There was then a shimmer and he was a man again. Karkengara remembered that such moment might mean the great god had thought something over for centuries, before returning to that moment in time. Whatever the ancient deity wanted of him, it was probably huge. For the first time, the bringer of fire thought he might actually enjoy whatever favour Horus was about to ask of him.

"I'd like you to move to the same timeline as Simon." Said Horus. "Not a temporary thing, once there, you'll be there for a long time; maybe forever."

To Karkengara it was a bit like expecting to be given a tedious punitive role, but getting a personal feast day; every day of the year. It was wonderful, it was amazing. Of course, there had to be a catch.

"Am I to help Simon on his quest for the great question?" Asked Karkengara.

"Yes, does that interest you my old friend?" Asked Horus.

Old friend was pushing it a bit; they'd had arguments that had gone on for centuries. Karkengara was willing to agree and smile, if it meant getting on Simon's team. The thought of helping to solve the ultimate question; the true meaning of Festina Lente. At least half a dozen popes had tried to find the answer to that one; and all of them had failed. Even the seemingly omniscient had failed.

"That interests me very much." Said the bringer of fire.

"The vampire is working with that fool Brother Alberti." Said Horus. "You'll be effectively working for them, until Simon Atherton either finds the great secret, or dies."

"I can cope with that, I'm sure of it."

"Last chance to say no." Said Horus. "Agree and my minions will take you to Italy at the time of the Medici. It will be done now, this very moment and even for a deity; it is likely to be a permanent shift in your timeline."

He had tasks in hand and there was Clara and her son to consider. On the other hand, the great secret was a quest worthy of an ancient god.

"I have people expecting my help." Said Karkengara. "May I borrow your minions to send them messages about letting them down."

"Yes, you may use my minions.....No mentioning of the great secret though." Said Horus.

"Fine, then I am ready to go." Said Karkengara.

"Good.....I have confidence in you old friend." Said Horus.

Horus seemed to have minions in almost limitless numbers. Karkengara started by sending one of them to tell Clara that he was going to have to let her down, that he could no longer help her look after her son. That hurt, especially as he couldn't give her a reason why. He needed a hundred and twenty minions to put his affairs in order and there was a nagging feeling that he'd forgotten someone.

"Are you ready to enter Simon's timeline?" Asked a minion.

"Yes, but I'm sure someone will be left wondering why I let them down."

The minions created another purple portal and Karkengara was carried to effectively another world. He was used to the technology and English vocabulary of modern day Britain. He was going to have to quickly acclimatise to renaissance era Italian and the age of the plough. There'd be some mighty intellects, but far fewer than most assumed in the age of enlightenment. Before he could ask exactly where they were taking him, Karkengara was invisible and in the large rear garden of Simon's house in Florence.

"You're expected." Said a minion, before vanishing.

Karkengara could sense several people in the lower rooms of Simon's quite large house. He remained invisible, apart from his head, which he pushed into what appeared to be a massive kitchen area. Two women screamed, they screamed very loudly. Obviously the minion was using a definition of the word 'expected,' which he'd never come across before. One of the women was Patsy Smart, who he recognised from London. The other woman was probably one of Simon's household servants.

“Stop yelling, I mean you no harm.” Said Karkengara. “I’m here to help you.”

Patsy hugged him around the neck, which stopped the other woman from screaming. It was a strange welcome, though it probably explained why Horus had told him he was needed immediately.

“Calm Patsy.....Tell me what’s happened ?” Asked the bringer of fire.

There was more wailing coming from upstairs, but he felt an invitation was needed before he began exploring the other floors.

“Giovanni is injured, but should live.” Said Patsy. “He was stabbed by the city guards and one had a poisoned blade.”

“You go to Giovanni and I’ll follow you.” Said Karkengara.

“He’s in a very small bedroom.” Said Patsy.

“All I need is room enough to push my head in through the wall.” Said Karkengara. “Go on.....It sounds as if time is an issue.”

“It is.....Or Simon might die.” Said Patsy.

No wonder Horus never dealt directly with such things. It felt as though he’d arrived in a world of chaos. Patsy took the stairs and Karkengara put his nose into the bedroom where an injured Giovanni was being tended.

“What demon comes to plague me now ?” Asked Giovanni, as he grabbed his sword off the floor next to the bed. The bed was quite bloody and even vampires could only lose so much blood before dying.

“I’m no demon.” Said Karkengara. “Keep still and I’ll heal your wounds.”

There was another woman in the room, holding a sword as though she’d have loved an excuse to skewer him with it. The bringer of fire found the wound left by the poisoned blade. It wasn’t that bad.

“I can heal this wound.”

“Good, I was beginning to feel woozy.” Said Giovanni.

Finally, the woman relaxed a little, though she still hadn’t said a word.

“Who are you then ?” Asked Karkengara.

“I am Juliana Colombo, daughter of Dominicho Colombo.” Said Juliana.

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The gods of another world looked horrific. Gen had tried to avoid spending too much time in their company. They seemed to understand the revulsion their appearance caused humans; so they tended to cover themselves in a cloud of darkness. Luckily the infamous occultist James Maynard had taught the strange gods English, or they might have simply picked it up as they went along. Gen would have loved to never see them properly again, but a meeting with them meant seeing far too much of their other worldly bodies. She was with them near the blood coated altar, which they never seemed to leave. Akiva was with her, under orders to never speak unless she asked him a direct question. She needed him with her though, for support if things went dreadfully wrong.

“Maynard said they’re tricky.” She’d told Akiva. “They may ask you what seems an innocent question and you’ll be theirs, a servant of the dark gods until the day you die.”

“I will remain silent while we’re with them.” Akiva had replied.

The alien gods had a strange smell about them, but it was their appearance that revolted her. Like hideous dwarves, with yellow skin and misshapen limbs. Maynard had hinted in his notes that they were rare; in that punishment of their sins seemed to begin while alive. Did that imply they could actually die ? It also begged the question about who might be punishing them ? Even Maynard admitted that his theories might be wrong. They were naked, with their genitals always on display.

“Have you agreed to pay us in the blood of the innocent ?” Asked one of the gods.

“That would anger the local people.” Said Gen. “I’ve heard they’re already curious about us, a curiosity that could easily turn to violence and hate.”

They grumbled and muttered at one another, those gods from another world. Gen didn’t need to understand their language to know they were unhappy. One of them pointed at her and said something to one of his fellow dark gods. Maybe Gen was becoming paranoid, but it had sounded like a threat.

“We’re not offering our powers for dogs’ blood.” Said one of the gods. “The pathway home is still open. We will leave unless you have an acceptable plan for paying us.”

“We need the blood of a child.” One of them shouted.

“Adult blood is available; there is a lot of violence and conflict in this area.” Said Gen. “My colleague assures me he can obtain enough adult human blood to pay you well. Isn’t that so Akiva ?”

“It is.....I can obtain more blood than you could ever imagine.” Said Akiva.

That sounded a little over the top, but the dark gods were obviously happy. There was a lot of conflict in neighbouring countries and Akiva would need help, but it was doable.

“Your offer is acceptable.” Said one of the dark gods.

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