

## **Clara Copley**

**(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)**

### **Chapter 15 – The Psochic Bible**

**‘Akiva Yatsko was in Syria and he was still very alive and still very much a mercenary; a fighter for hire. There were rumours he’d died, Akiva had actually started most of them. For a fighter for hire, being semi-officially dead had advantages.’**

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Niña entered the room in a happy frame of mind. Clara had mentioned it was the last room before Dragon Courtyard. Not that Niña had any real idea what Dragon Courtyard was, or why Clara seemed to think it was important. There had been dragon statues in several of the rooms and dragon drawings on walls. Niña was fairly sure there’d be a dragon statue in the courtyard. As to what it did ? She was learning that patience really could be a virtue.

“You’ll be pleased to hear, that the door to the courtyard, has a simple lock.” Said Clara. “At least it had an easy lock the last time I passed this way.”

The room they were in was fairly grubby, after a succession of fairly clean chambers. Several doors were broken, revealing corridors beyond. Clara was sure though, they could ignore nearly all the doors, even the broken ones.

“We want the door with a red dragon painted on it.” Said Clara.

“Who makes all the changes to the hidden rooms ?” Asked Niña.

It was a question that had been building in her mind. Someone was obviously watching what went on, which implied someone with power was monitoring the rooms and maybe, the entire house.

“Ahhh, I’m not the expert Laura is on such things.” Said Clara. “There are Gods, Niña and there are Old Gods. Then there are the truly Ancient Gods. One of those looks after these locked off rooms. Laura will be able to give you chapter and verse on the matter. Now, I see the door with a red dragon. Let’s get it open.”

Niña knew a few magical spells; most vampires dabbled in the dark arts; even if they were a long way from being experts. As far as she knew, Clara wasn’t even a mildly useful magician, or sorcerer. She could use a simple ‘open’ cantrip though, even if it surprised Niña to see her make the required hand gestures. It was a basic spell, part of any decent magician’s repertoire. Sadly, it didn’t seem to be Clara’s day.

“Ahhhh, the lock has been changed.” Said Clara. “This lock is now beyond my skills to open. Do you have a favourite lock opening spell, Niña ?”

“I was taught a few spells by a witch.” Said Niña. “I can’t guarantee it will work, but I’ll give it a try.”

Niña remembered the words and the hand gestures; all quite complex for a simple spell to open locks. She was sure she’d got everything right, but the result was unexpected. There was a brief flash of fire around the lock and then white smoke rose from it. Clara tried the door, just in case the spell had worked. The door didn’t open, or even budge a little bit.

“Sorry, that’s all I know.....And I made it worse.” Said Niña.

“My attempt was no better.” Said Clara. “At least you managed a little fire and smoke. You can help me get the door open. I think it will be quite easy, if we ignore the rules.”

“What rules ?” Asked Niña.

"It's the truly Ancient Gods you see; they expect everyone to follow the rules." Said Clara. "Ruin the door lock if you like, but leave everything else intact. Being honest, I think they like it if someone breaks their damned rules. I intend to go through this door, by any means possible. Are you with me, Niña ? Are you ready to break the rules ?"

"Of course I am.....Tell me what to do." Said Niña.

Clara stood in front of the door, her palms pressing against the wood.

"Here, stand next to me and put your hands on the door." Said Clara. "Palms ready to push, just like mine."

Vampires were strong, very strong. The door looked tough though and even with the two of them using every bit of strength; Niña couldn't see them getting it open. But, it was give it a really good try or wait for Karkengara to rescue them. Niña pressed her palms against the door.

"Now, one of the spells I do know." Said Clara. "An augmentation spell I was taught by one of Laura's friendly Gods. This one augments strength to ludicrous levels. I'll not use the God's name, that could be a problem, as we're about to break the rules. When I say push as hard as you can.....Push as hard as you can."

"I will, I'll push really hard." Said Niña.

Niña had heard Laura say the occasional line or two of a spell, in the language of the Ancient Ones, the very first of the Gods. It was rare, but Laura had used a certain tone of voice, a certain gravitas in her voice. Clara sounded different, but she also sounded the same as Laura. Clara and her were both instantly covered in a yellow mist, which quickly faded.

"Now, Niña !" Yelled Clara. "Push.....Push as hard as you can."

The door lock didn't break, but the entire doorframe came away, as they both pushed hard on the door. The doorframe broke apart, with pieces of brickwork coming away with it. By the time the door fell and hit the floor, Niña felt they could move anything; after one of Clara's augmentation spells. The door hit the floor, with a noise like thunder.

"Wow.....We should always break the rules." Said Niña.

"We're there..... Dragon Courtyard." Said Clara. "No more spending hours in the grubby early chambers. We can now come straight here."

"I knew it.....I knew there'd be a dragon statue." Said Niña.

Up against one wall, as though the builders hadn't had time to place it somewhere the statue would have looked truly magnificent. It had to be twenty feet from sculpted dragon nose, to dragon tail. Realistic to Niña's eyes, as it looked very much like a small version of Karkengara. Red wings and a body with green skin, the dragon looked almost too real. To Niña it was a little frightening.

"Does this one have a button that does something ?" Asked Niña.

"Yes it does.....Right under its chin." Said Clara.

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After an epic start, the fight with the school guards had quickly petered out. A few were dead, but it seemed obvious that the School of Esoteric Wisdom hadn't recruited the bravest of guards. Upon seeing a few of their number die, killed with apparent ease by the unwanted visitors; the survivors had prostrated themselves on the floor. A few had even begged for mercy. As for the head of the school ? Laura had left Monseigneur Gérard Mariette with a few wounds, but he'd survive. He owed his survival to Adelaide, who realised he was probably the only one to know where the Hand of Albrecht was kept. It was after all, a very large building, with quite a few outbuildings.

"I've never professed to be a fighter, but these people." Said Adelaide. "I've seen some incompetence in my time, but nothing like the Monseigneur and his guards."

"Some people just aren't cut out to be fighters." Said Tim.

"Well Gérard, do I have to use pain, or will you give us the Hand ?" Asked Laura.

Laura felt disappointed, she'd been looking forward to drinking the blood of a Monseigneur. She was actually hoping he wouldn't talk. It would give her an excuse to give him a serious beating. Gérard looked at her with a look of contempt, but said nothing.

"Fine.....I'll enjoy making you suffer." Said Laura.

"I want to take a few lumps out of him too." Said Adelaide.

She'd barely touched him, when the Monseigneur began shrieking like a man being flayed alive. He fell to the floor and started kicking his legs about, like a child having a tantrum.

"For fuck's sake, Gérard." Said Laura. "Tell me where you put the Hand and I won't hurt a hair on your head....I promise. There's no need for this nonsense."

"I loathe cowards." Said Tim.

"I won't tell you, but I'll take you there." Said Gérard. "I also want a guarantee that when you have the Hand, you'll let me go. No beatings, no more wounds. Do you agree ? Do I have your promise ?" It seemed like something they all needed to agree on. Laura looked at Tim, who nodded at her. Adelaide looked fed up about it, but she too nodded at her.

"You have your guarantee." Said Laura. "No harm will come to you. Now.....Take us to where the Hand is kept."

It was Tim who pointed out the obvious. Leave the surviving guards behind and they were certain to cause trouble. There'd be consequences from leaving them unguarded, probably unpleasant consequences. Laura could have killed them all, but that seemed a little over the top. It was Adelaide who suggested taking the guards with them.

"We know they're gutless." Said Adelaide. "Not the sort to try and hurt us, but they might be useful if anything heavy needs to be carried."

"Sounds weird.....But you're right." Said Laura.

The lift wouldn't take them all, so they used the stairs. There were quite a few threats to the guards; the usual unpleasantness in quite a bit of detail. They didn't care, they just seemed happy to no longer be serving the Monseigneur.

"The woman, who opened the door to us, will have called someone." Said Tim. "There will be reinforcements on the way for the guards."

"Which means we have to get this done quickly." Said Laura.

Laura was happy to take the lead, as they left the building on the ground floor and headed towards one of the outbuildings. Laura was certain that she could outrun Gérard, if he tried to run away. The building they were heading for looked like a summerhouse; a very tatty and grubby summerhouse.

"If this is a trap, Gérard.....You'll be the first to die." Said Adelaide.

"No trap, I've got no trust in the guards." Said the Monseigneur. "I've always hidden the Hand of Albrecht in the dilapidated summerhouse."

The summerhouse door wasn't locked and they were soon inside. The guards could have easily run off, but none of them did. They seemed to be viewing Laura as a rescuer, rather than a jailer. There was the smell of mould in the summerhouse, mixed with something else. Rat droppings, Laura recognised the smell from a few underground places she'd fought in.

"Your summerhouse stinks of rats and damp." Said Laura.

"This place is filthy and stinks of vermin." Said Adelaide. "Gérard..... You should be ashamed, letting school buildings get in this condition."

"No one cares what this place is like.....They simply don't care." Said Gérard.

"Come on.....Give us the Hand and we'll be on our way." Said Laura.

How long would it take help to arrive for the Monseigneur ? If the woman had called someone as soon as she'd heard the first gunshot, they'd be well on the way there. She didn't seem the sort to react quickly though and might well still be pondering on making the call. No matter what the truth of the situation, there was no time to dawdle.

"Time to hand over the Hand." Said Tim, with a huge grin.

"This way, it's on the first floor." Said Gérard.

A summerhouse with an upstairs; that was a first for Laura. It was really a proper building, with a huge staircase up to the first floor. It looked like the former residence of whoever had originally built the place. Upstairs was no cleaner, though there was far less stench of mould and vermin.

"Second door on the right." Said Gérard.

It had probably been beautiful once, with its plaster cherubs on the ceiling and the four poster bed. A wonderful master bedroom, which wouldn't have looked out of place in Blenheim Palace. That was when it had been built; it was now a ruin, with nature taking over. There was a broken window and the rain was getting in; probably snow too, in the winter.

"This bedroom must have once been beautiful." Said Adelaide.

"Yeah, whatever.....The Hand is in the top drawer of the dressing table." Said Gérard.

Laura remembered Old Thomas, who had put traps in drawers. She slowly opened the drawer, to discover a fairly grubby looking shoebox. It felt as though the main themes of The School of Esoteric Wisdom; were filth, damp and corruption.

"It's in the shoe box." Said Gérard.

A box originally for a pair of black brogues, size nine. Laura knew there was a trap; by the way Gérard was suddenly looking nervous. He was probably sweating profusely, but she was just picking up a fast heartbeat and a lot of anxiety. He had to try something though, or he was a dead man. Trying to fight them was going to get him killed, but so would giving her the Hand. His employers would never put up with that kind of treachery. One way or another, Gérard was in deep trouble. Laura handed the shoe box to Gérard. His heartbeat began to get close to tachycardia.

"You open it." Said Laura.

"No !" Screeched Gérard.

He threw the box and ran, though Tim made sure he didn't get too far. Monseigneur Gérard Mariette ended his days being run through by a sword Tim had taken from a dead guard. To Laura, there was a kind of justice in that. The shoe box hit the floor and exploded, with a bright heat, which Laura felt on her face.

"The Hand.....It will have been destroyed." Said Adelaide.

"I've seen him talk to the Hand, as though it was a real person." Said a guard. "It's still in the drawer.....Right at the back."

Laura fully opened the drawer and there it was, exactly as it had looked in the drawings Nathalie had shown her. Laura reached for it.

"Don't touch it with your bare hand." Said Adelaide. "The Hand does strange things to people, even to those who think they're its master."

"Thank you.....I wasn't thinking." Said Laura.

An elegant woman must have once called the bedroom hers; there was a grubby silk scarf in the drawer. It must have looked wonderful before the damp had got to it. It was good enough to fold over a few times, before using it to pick up the Hand.

"Now we need to get moving." Said Adelaide. "We can't take the guards with us; the car hasn't got room for them."

The poor guards, one or two seemed to assume their moment of death had arrived. They had an expression on their faces, which Laura recognised. She'd seen the same expression on the faces of some she'd fed on.

"We're not going to hurt you." Laura told the guards. "Nor can we take you with us. Grab what you can from the school and run.....Never come back here."

They went, though none of them seemed excited by the idea. Laura wrapped the Hand in the scarf and shoved it into a jacket pocket.

"Now.....We really do need to get a long way from here." Said Tim.

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Nathalie Aurigny was enjoying her day, which was strange, as it was a Monday. Mondays tended to mean coming in to a pile of emails to sort out and voicemails from aggrieved staff and assorted freelancers. Usually Monday sucked, but this one didn't. It was the Psochic Bible of course; it was a book with literally no ceiling to its potential. If ever anything could be said to genuinely be priceless, it was the Psochic Bible.

"I know archiving want to test the paper, Gen." Said Nathalie. "They'll just have to wait.....If one paragraph can be shown to be authentic, the whole book is authentic."

She'd been giving Genevieve a hard time, Nathalie knew that. It wasn't control freakery, as she'd heard whispered about her. It was the need to make sure they wouldn't leave her, if things went wrong. It was crazy of course, to treat employees like a relationship; a toxic relationship at that. It was how she was though and in her mid-forties, Nathalie thought she was too set in her ways to try a new approach. Anyway, Gen seemed to be getting used to her. Gen was looking at the paragraph that had been translated from the original Latin.

"We're really going to become alchemists?" Asked Gen. "I love the idea of us creating gold."

"Lots of gold.....And it'll all be recorded on several cameras." Said Nathalie. "Let anyone try to say the Psochic Bible isn't genuine, when we've created a few million dollars' worth of gold."

"Wow, what will we do with the gold?" Asked Gen.

"Sell it of course, turn it into Euros." Said Nathalie. "I'll be relying on you; Gen. You'll be working hard for a while and doing weird hours. Some of the gold will be yours."

"Wow, really?"

If she said Wow one more time. Nathalie had decided that she liked Gen and trusted her to get things done. It might not last, but for a while at least, she was going to treat her very well. She was allowed to say Wow, as often as she liked.

"You'll earn it Gen.....You'll be working abroad quite a bit." Said Nathalie. "How do you like the idea of being my right arm in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia?"

"Wow, that sounds brilliant." Said Gen. "Aren't I supposed to be with Laura in Munich?"

"No roughing it, only the best hotels for my people." Said Nathalie. "Once we have the exact dates, you can book everything. It will be soon though; Gen. Let friends and family know you'll soon be spending time in Africa. As for Laura.....She and Tim can take care of themselves."

It wasn't just that, people had a habit of getting into trouble when they helped Laura. Gen was a normal fragile human, who might actually die while helping Laura and Tim. Nathalie wouldn't say that to Gen, but she didn't want to see her as another mug shot of a dead employee. She'd seen enough of those coming from the Old City of Jerusalem.

"Will I have someone with me in Addis Ababa?" Asked Gen.

"No one from the Silver Dawn travels alone." Said Nathalie. "I'm not sure who will be with you, but there will be at least three of you in Ethiopia. They'll be your backup; Gen. I'm relying on you to get things done."

"What will I be getting done in Africa?" Asked Gen.

"For a start you can read everything on Samuel Westcott." Said Nathalie. "His version of the Psochic Bible was a fake, but that doesn't mean he didn't have access to the real thing. He died with a bank balance that would get investigated if he'd died today. When he died in 1891, no one looked twice at his personal fortune of five million pounds."

"Five million.....No wonder people kept digging in and around his tomb." Said Gen.

"Samuel was a crook, but an interesting crook." Said Nathalie. "He's well worth investigating. Put everything you can find on a laptop to take with you. I believe Samuel was an alchemist.....It's the only way to explain that personal fortune."

"That still doesn't explain me going to Ethiopia." Said Gen.

Persistent, Nathalie liked that in a PA. If it didn't make sense, or wasn't logical, Gen would keep at it; like a dog with a particularly tasty bone. That was one of the reasons Nathalie didn't want to lose her.

"Samuel Westcott built a home near Addis Ababa." Said Nathalie. "A huge rambling place, which he called the Westcott Villa. He was living there when most of that personal fortune began to end up in reputable banks. He had the alchemy section of a genuine Psochic Bible, that much is obvious. He wouldn't get rid of it, so it will still be in his large, rambling villa. I want you to go there and find those alchemy instructions. Will you do that for me?"

"Yes, Nathalie.....That sounds exciting." Said Gen.

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"I like what the builders have accomplished." Said Clara. "A little more expensive than Hacker Jim's buddies, but I trust these new ones. I can see the house improving every day. They were a good find Niña."

"No one will get up those drainpipes now." Said Niña. "No less than three sets of spikes now, enough to deter even a professional burglar."

They were still in Dragon Courtyard and Clara was using a quick break as thinking time. Niña couldn't be allowed to explore the hidden rooms on her own, it was far too dangerous. On the other hand Clara was too busy to spend days exploring and Laura was in Munich. Mabina might be useful, she loved an adventure and it didn't mean her leaving London. There was also Ronnie, who had gone past the worst of her grieving for Jim. She'd make an ideal companion for Niña, as she explored the locked off rooms. Clara would never have admitted it, but there were rooms and chambers she'd never seen.

"I'm very pleased with your choice of builders." Said Clara.

A little praise worked wonders with the girl, she was almost glowing with pleasure.

"They like Justin and I believe he likes them, especially Tony." Said Niña.

"I think you're right, my son has taken a liking to our new builders." Said Clara. "Come and stand with me in front of the dragon statue, we need to setup the fast route to the first corridor."

"Where do you want me?"

"Stand next to me.....I need to press the button under its chin." Said Clara.

The last time Clara had pressed the button, Laura and Simon had been stood with her. It was strange how many things made her think of Simon Atherton. Not that she minded, most memories of him

made her smile. A few memories made her think of sex and one or two made her purr like a huge cat.

"Closer to me, Niña." Said Clara. "As close to me as you can get."

Clara pressed the button and for a few seconds, they were covered by a yellow glow. There was no beep, no way of knowing it had worked. There had been a lot to work out on the first few visits to the rooms and Niña would never have to do all that work.

"Is that it?" Asked Niña.

"Feel lucky, Laura and I worked for days trying to work out what the dragon statue did. Step into the circle on the tiles to the right of the statue and you'll go back to the entrance corridor. There is now a similar circle there, on a similar tile. Step into that circle and you get back here." Said Clara.

"Great.....That'll save me so much time." Said Niña.

Now it came, the moment to get her word to never enter the rooms on her own. Clara trusted Niña to some extent, but she needed the girl to give her word on it. Niña was old school when it came to giving her word. Once she'd given it, she'd keep to it.

"The quick travel only lasts for a few months." Said Clara. "It will then reset and you're back to getting here the hard and frustrating way. I know, this is about my fifth time through this place."

"I'll do my exploring quickly then." Said Niña.

"Not on your own though." Said Clara. "You could literally vanish and we'd have no idea where to look. Trust me, being a vampire wouldn't be an advantage. You wouldn't die of starvation, but after a few centuries, you'd be nothing but a walking corpse. We need blood.....Awful things happen if we don't get it."

"I didn't realise, that sounds awful." Said Niña.

And Clara hadn't told her the worst. Simon and her had discovered the dead bodies of two vampires who'd had no blood to feed on for at least two hundred years. In the end they seemed to have turned on each other. By then their bodies had become nothing but a little bone and gristle.

"You can ask Mabina to explore with you, or Ronnie." Said Clara. "Either of them will do, or maybe Laura if she's around. But I want your word that you will no longer explore the hidden rooms on your own."

"But.....I'm not a fool, Clara."

"I know you're not, but please give me your word on this." Said Clara.

"Very well." Said Niña. "I give you my word.....I will never explore the locked off rooms on my own."

She meant it, Clara could tell. No strange vampire skill, she could tell the girl was sincere by her voice and general attitude.

"Come on, there is a garden beyond one of the courtyard doors." Said Clara. "One of the few open spaces among the many rooms and chambers. Unless it's been changed we can see the house in Grizzana from the garden. The house where Simon and Giovanni lived.....The house where you once lived."

"That would be so nice.....To see the house again." Said Niña.

"Simon no longer lives there, so don't expect to see him." Said Clara. "And hope that it's a dry, sunny day. Standing in the rain to see the house, is never pleasant."

There was no lock, the door opened easily into a fairly large garden. Not that well maintained, but there were gravel pathways to get around, without going through the uncut grass. The garden had been left to go wild, but Niña was excited.

"I can see our house.....Over the hedge, I can see it." Yelled Niña.

The grass was long and a little damp, but that didn't stop Niña running right up to the hedge. Only about five feet high and beyond it was the back of Simon's old home in Grizzana. There was no way to get past the hedge; Clara had tried so many things. It was nice though, to simply stand and look at the house.

"That was my home." Said Niña. "Do you know who lives there now?"

"I've not looked that often." Said Clara. "Last time I looked over the hedge there was a woman in the garden, with two small children."

"Can we get into their garden?"

"No, we can look and hear.....But never enter their world." Said Clara.

They watched the house for a while, until what might be a servant hung washing up to dry in the garden. That was it; the high spot of at least half an hour, watching a few windows, hoping someone would come out. Niña seemed happy though.

"I'm glad we came.....Just seeing the house again is wonderful." Said Niña. "Can I come back here again?"

"As often as you like." Said Clara. "I need to get home; I have a baby to feed. Before we use the dragon portal to get back, we can briefly open The Door of the Saints. Not real saints, it's just been called that for a very long time. And don't ask me how I know that, ask Laura. She's the expert on the locked off rooms."

"I hope Ronnie agrees to help me explore." Said Niña.

"I'm sure she will.....Anything for an adventure, that's our Ronnie." Said Clara.

The door was the other side of the overgrown garden, which someone had allowed to become what some called a meadow. Just an excuse to be lazy, was Clara's thought on it. There was a shed on the other side of the garden, a plain wooden shed, painted green.

"I ignored the shed for ages, until I opened the door purely out of curiosity." Said Clara.

Again, there was no lock on the door. Clara opened the shed door, to reveal a long and wide passageway. Along both sides of the passage were marble statues of people, normal human looking people.

"The saints, though not our saints." Said Clara. "A quarter of a mile of saints, before another door. I'll leave you to explore beyond that door. Laura was sure the saints had to be a huge puzzle to discover something truly amazing. If they are, Laura never found out how to solve the puzzle. We need to get back now.....But happy exploring, Niña."

"These rooms, this place.....It's all amazing." Said Niña.

"Just remember to come home occasionally.....Just so I know you're alright." Said Clara.

"I will and you have my word, Clara. I will never explore on my own." Said Niña.

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Akiva Yatsko was in Syria and he was still very alive and still very much a mercenary; a fighter for hire. There were rumours he'd died, Akiva had actually started most of them. For a fighter for hire, being semi-officially dead had advantages. Enemies didn't totally stop looking for you, but they were less intense about it. His life had been much more quiet and peaceful since being semi-officially dead. Akiva was also an assassin for hire and there had recently been a good payday. There were more insurgents in Syria than a feral dog has fleas. He'd managed to trace an insurgent leader to the port of Latakia. With a little skill and a lot of luck, Akiva had managed to kill Omar Bashar and three of his guards. Quite an accomplishment as Omar had been on the Israeli most wanted list for nearly a decade. Despite being semi-officially dead, Akiva had a nagging feeling that Omar's henchmen



were still looking for him.....Hell bent on vengeance. As bullets from an assault rifle hit the wall behind him, Akiva realised it had been a mistake to return to Syria.

"Damn, I was hoping Damascus would be safe." Said Akiva.

"Nowhere is safe in Syria." Said Rashid.

Rashid was an Egyptian who'd helped him find the insurgent leader Omar Bashar. For some reason Rashid had remained with him through several different countries and many safe houses. Akiva usually worked alone, but sometimes; it was nice to have someone watching your back.

"The police don't give a shit who kills who." Said Rashid. "Gunfire just tends to make them patrol in another part of the city."

Akiva wasn't a vampire, but he wasn't totally human either. He'd been on the side of the Psochics in the past and they'd altered him. Augmentation was their term for it and he'd come out of it permanently stronger and faster. He wasn't right after it though, not his old self. Akiva had killed the Psochic scientist who'd fucked him up and gone to work for the Silver Dawn. Now he considered himself to be freelance. He counted weapons firing, as the next storm of bullets thudded into the brick wall behind them.

"We're in trouble, Rashid." Said Akiva. "I count at least five of them, maybe six."

"Bastards." Said Rashid. "Who do you think they are?"

"Could be anyone from numerous groups.....I've a good price on my head." Said Akiva.

He was waiting for Rashid to ask how much was a good price. If he did, it would mean watching Rashid, while he tried to watch five insurgents. Luckily Rashid never asked the question. More bullets hit the wall and there was a siren somewhere a long way to the south.

"Shit.....That's an army siren.....We'll have to make a run for it." Said Akiva.

The army weren't supposed to favour any side in the various conflicts, but Akiva had made a lot of enemies in the Syrian armed forces. If they caught him, he might be skinned, before being hacked to pieces.

"Yeah.....We can't get taken by the army." Said Rashid.

Akiva had an apartment in Jobar, a village not far to the east of Damascus. It would be safe, he'd been careful about making sure no one followed him there. Getting there though, with five heavily armed men chasing after them. It was going to be difficult.

"I think we need to get to my place in Jobar." Said Akiva.

Rashid looked around the wall and fired half a clip at their attackers.

"Fine.....Let's go.....Right now and running like fuck." Said Rashid.

They ran across the rooftops and Akiva heard the whine of bullets going past their heads. There should have been a jump down to the ground at the end of the street full of souks. A drop of about ten or maybe twelve feet, which was fine, but there was a chance of a twisted ankle. Akiva fired twice at the men behind him and knew two of them had died. Like vampires, he could feel the heartbeats of those chasing them.

"Now only three of them coming after us." Said Akiva.

"Wonderful.....I know we're going to make it." Said Rashid.

The drop from the shop at the end of the row was wrong. There'd been another building there once, before someone had dropped a bomb on it. There was now a hole, which made it a drop of at least seventy feet. Akiva might survive jumping, but Rashid wouldn't.

"Shit.....We need to find another way." Said Akiva.

There was the bark of an old AK47, as it sent bullets in their direction. Akiva saw the seven point six two rounds, open up Rashid's back. For a moment, Akiva could see Rashid's spine. His friend and comrade from quite a few encounters, was dead.

"Sorry Rashid.....No time to bury you." Said Akiva.

He leapt from the roof, landing in the crater, which had once been someone's home. He rolled and luck was with him; he didn't damage any joints, or pull any muscles. Akiva was up and running, as more bullets came at him. Again luck was on his side.....The bullets ripped into the ground and found a few ruined walls, but none hit him. Those chasing after him would never attempt the jump down to continue chasing him.

"I'll get my stuff from Jobar and never come to Syria again.....Ever." Akiva muttered.

There had been a call to a friend of his recently, from Nathalie Aurigny; current boss of the Silver Dawn. She'd been hinting about a job Akiva might be interested in, if his semi-official death was just crap and gas lighting. Once he'd collected the few personal possessions he cared about from the apartment in Jobar, he'd call Nathalie.

"She always pays well." Akiva muttered.

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