

## Clara Copley

(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)

### Chapter 13 - Hornsey

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'Hornsey had been Clara's home for several years. A move from a rented place in Wood Green, the Hornsey house had been bought at a time when there'd been serious cash to spare.

Hornsey, postal district N8. Located in North London, with a population of around thirteen thousand. Why had they bought a large house in that part of London ?

It was an area with some gentrification, but also quite a few fixer-uppers. The house was on a slight hill near Hornsey Rail Station, which had been another point in its favour. From Hornsey Station it was a quick journey to Finsbury Park and links to the Tube network.

The house hadn't been that much of a fixer-upper, but it had needed some work. It was also in an area where people believed in the great tradition of knowing absolutely nothing about their neighbours. For three vampires living under the same roof, that had been a huge plus.

Clara had taken the decision to say no to Simon and a life in Florence. For better or worse, the house in Hornsey was going to be home for her and Justin Ned Atherton; her child.....'

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Simon Atherton liked his house in Florence, though he was resigned to not seeing much of it for a while. Brother Alberti had been pestering him, reminding him that not even vampires were guaranteed a long life.

"You may live many thousands of years, or run afoul of an assassin tomorrow. If all your sacrifices are to mean anything, you need to start looking for it again. Find the ultimate secret, Simon."

Festina Lente – Make haste slowly; it was the key to the great secret; some would say the ultimate secret. Simon had already been to some very wild and lonely parts of the globe. He had his own ideas about what Festina Lente might mean. Not that he told Brother Alberti about every idea he had. It wasn't because of a lack of trust in Brother Alberti. Simon's theories were often too weird and wild to risk ridicule by the Head of the Brotherhood.

"You look so beautiful when you're sleeping." Said Simon.

He'd been up for a while, but Patsy Smart had rolled over and gone back to sleep. The day before had been a long day for both of them. Patsy had moved though, she'd shifted her entire life to fifteenth century Florence. It was strange to think of her as the girl who'd approached him on a Friday night; on the Piccadilly Line. Never timid, but to shift her life to another time ! That took bravery and trust in Simon to be faithful and loyal. He was determined to never let her down. Patsy's eyes opened and she smiled at him.

"How long have you been watching me ?" Asked Patsy.

"Not long.....Get up and I'll make you breakfast."

"Is it real, Simon ?" Patsy asked. "I woke last night and thought it might all be a dream. Tell me you love me.....Tell me this is where we'll call home."

Simon crouched next to the bed and put his arms around her. Much of his life often felt so uncertain, yet Patsy had asked him two questions he was certain of.



"Yes, Patsy.....I love you." Said Simon. "I've probably loved you since I saw you heading for a party on the Piccadilly Line. I rarely gave strange girls my telephone number, but there was something about you."

"Hey, who are you calling strange, Mr Atherton?"

Patsy pulled him onto the bed and they wrestled for a while, mixed with a lot of kissing. It was how he'd imagined their first morning would be and had been disappointed that it hadn't.

"And my last question.....Is this our home now, our forever home?" Asked Patsy.

Forever was a hard thing to define, much less guarantee. In his heart though, Simon was hoping Patsy would never tire of him and their life on the road; searching for the ultimate secret. He had no doubts about her. Patsy would be with him until the end, he could tell. Eventually he'd offer to turn her, but there was no hurry. Laura had known Tim for years, before making him one of them, a vampire; Satan's favourite children, if you believed such things.

"I love you Patsy Smart and I promise.....This is our forever home." Said Simon.

"And I love you Simon Atherton."

It was a hot morning in Florence, the kind of morning which seemed to be made for early morning sex. They were soon naked and enjoying each other in a way that never, ever seemed boring.

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Clara Copley wasn't into declarations of love with Noah. Their relationship was just beginning; at the point where it wasn't usually appropriate to get too attached. The sex was good and that mattered. Not that Noah was her usual type, but that might actually be a good thing. Ronnie had dated Noah and had said he could be a bit possessive. Clara wasn't taking much notice of that comment. After all, Ronnie had two times Noah to sleep with dear departed Hacker Jim.

"Our last day in Jerusalem." Said Clara. "I never really felt I'd miss the place, not the other times I've been here. Now though; I really don't want to go."

"We could stay a few more days." Said Noah.

They were in their suite in the American Colony hotel in Jerusalem. Their last day; they were flying back to London that night.

"No, I need to get back to my son." Said Clara. "Then I have to see Cyril. Everything will change now that Rory is dead."

Clara had an idea about making Noah the new manager of the Luna Blue, the gem of Cyril's chain of restaurants, clubs and gaming establishments. It would be a huge step up for Noah, who'd originally been hired as a driver. Cyril would probably agree, but there was a chance he'd say no. Clara wasn't going to mention it to Noah, until it was certain.

"What's the official story on Rory?" Asked Noah.

"He emptied his flat and vanished." Said Clara. "His current girlfriend vanished too, so it looks as though they went away together. Everyone at the Luna Blue will guess the truth, but it will never be spoken about."

The plan had been to go out to eat and do a little souvenir shopping. Despite the recent destruction of part of the Armenian Quarter, there were still a huge number of souks in Jerusalem. There'd be plenty of places to buy the obligatory souvenirs. It was a hot day out and the aircon in their suite made it very comfortable. They called room service for a meal and spent the afternoon naked. There was sex, but there was also a lot of simply talking, getting to know one another.

"I know so little about you, Clara." Said Noah. "Where were you born?"



"I am over five hundred years old." Said Clara. "I was born in rural England, into a family of farmers. Yes, I once had parents and a few siblings. We were poor of course; everyone in our village was poor."

"I can't imagine you as a kid in rags." Said Noah. "I can barely imagine you with parents."

"I had the usual village life, until a fire at the mill took it all away." Said Clara. "A flour explosion and fire, it destroyed half the village and killed a lot of people. I went from having a family, to being looked after by a penniless aunt. Until the vampires arrived and turned me."

"I thought it was Simon who turned you." Said Noah. "Who were these vampires?"

The story involved Daniel, in a way that either showed him as a hero, or as evil and manipulative. After hundreds of years, Clara still had her doubts about why he'd behaved the way he had. She wasn't going to tell Noah about it, at least not yet.

"I will tell you everything, but for now.....I've told you enough." Said Clara. "How about ordering some snacks and another bottle of champagne?"

"That.....Sounds perfect." Said Noah.

Simon would have pushed her to tell all; he had pushed her to tell him about the MP who'd betrayed her. Clara really wasn't sure if she preferred being pushed for information, or left in peace if she asked. Simon and Noah were so different. It was going to take some getting used to.

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No journeys to airports anymore for Laura and Tim; no wondering about how many hours to allow for checking in and getting boarding documents. With her Gudara around, Laura was happy to trust him to take Tim and her, just about everywhere. He could still turn up naked at the worst of possible times, but the people in Brittany would get used to his foibles. Again, Nathalie left Tim and her in peace, until they'd finished eating in the refectory.

"This food.....Far better than at the Red Rose." Said Tim. "They could open a few branches and make a fortune."

"Funny you should say that." Said Laura. "Adelaide Ducomble worked here, before she became a famous restaurateur. Guess who put together the menu for Nathalie's refectory?"

"You're kidding." Said Tim.

"As if I'd ever kid you." Said Laura. "It explains why the food is so good."

They'd no sooner pushed their plates to one side, when a young woman approached them. Not Nathalie's new and likely to soon be gone PA. The new PA was Genevieve, though everyone called her Gen. The woman sent for them was young, probably a trainee of some kind.

"Sorry.....Nathalie wants to see you both." Said the woman.

It was annoying, but Laura had known worse bosses. At least Nathalie always let them finish their meal. Tim raised his eyebrows at her, but Nathalie was shaping up to be almost the ideal boss. Laura was paid well and there was a pay rise on the way; a reward for finding the genuine Psochic Bible. Plus Nathalie no longer seemed worried about how much work Laura actually did for her pay. There was just the grabbing them in the refectory business, which Laura could live with.

"No need to show us the way." Said Tim. "We know where Nathalie's office is."

The woman looked awkward, she'd probably already found out that Nathalie had a mean side. She probably thought she was duty bound to see them right into Nathalie's office.

"You won't get in trouble, honest." Said Laura. "Nathalie won't expect you to escort us."

The woman nodded at her and went away.

"What does Nathalie do to these people?" Asked Tim.



"Probably best not to know." Said Laura. "She drove poor David Huynh to despair and they were sleeping together at the time."

They were expected; Nathalie already had a tray of coffee cups on her desk and a plateful of assorted biscuits. Whatever the Silver Dawn might lack, it definitely deserved a ten out of ten for hospitality.

"Tim....Laura, so good to see you both." Said Nathalie. "My clerics will need to examine the Psochic Bible for some time, maybe even years. The quick verdict though, is that it's the genuine article. It really is a priceless ancient tome."

"That is good to know." Said Laura.

Nathalie was beaming at her, then looking at Tim as though he too, had worked some kind of miracle. That was the trick with Nathalie, achieve the impossible for her. Vampires had an edge of course, a likelihood of surviving to do the impossible. Humans like David Huynh and Genevieve were always going to eventually let her down, simply because they were human.

"Glad we could be of service." Said Tim, with a grin.

Nathalie had access to the feed from every camera in the Silver Dawn base, and a few in the local town of Plouharn. If there was trouble that might head their way, Nathalie wanted to know about it. Laura knew she was expecting someone, when she kept looking at the top left of her computer screen.

"I was hoping you'd say something like that." Said Nathalie. "Adelaide Ducomble is on her way; lost in one of the car parks it seems. There is a job that I'm sure you two could make a success of. More suited to your skills than the expertise of one of my clerics. They're not really suited to fighting our enemies. So, how do you both fancy spending some time in Munich?"

Another task, far sooner than Laura had expected. Tim was smiling, obviously keen to impress Nathalie with their skills. Laura had been to Munich once and to recycle a very old joke, it had been closed that day. Not the world's most exciting city, but if there was a five star hotel with room service, Laura was happy to put up with a hell of a lot.

"We can be in Munich as soon as you want us there." Said Laura.

"Good.....You're fast becoming my two favourite go to people." Said Nathalie. "I can see Adelaide coming in the front door; she must have found the car park."

"Will Adelaide be coming with us to Munich?" Asked Tim.

"We can go through the details once she's here." Said Nathalie. "Have either of you heard of the Hand of Albrecht?"

"No." Said Tim.

"I haven't either, but it sounds interesting." Said Laura.

Adelaide Ducomble chose that moment to stride into Nathalie's office. She had a limp, or at least favoured her left leg a little. It had to be an old wound. Laura couldn't remember Adelaide being injured during the recent fight with the Psochics.

"Late I'm afraid." Said Adelaide. "Your security people insisted on checking my credentials at least six times."

"There are rumours about the Psochics hitting back." Said Nathalie. "Personally I can't see it happening, but there's no use in hiring security consultants, if I ignore their advice."

"Ahhh.....I see coffee and biscuits." Said Adelaide.

Adelaide was the boss at the Red Rose, the lady who gave out orders and controlled a very successful business. In Brittany she was a senior person, but Nathalie was the one in charge. That



made a difference, with Adelaide smiling, as she helped herself to a couple of garibaldi biscuits. Laura thought they'd never seen the real Adelaide in Jerusalem.

"As I'd hoped, Laura and Tim are happy to help with the Hand of Albrecht." Said Nathalie.

"Have you told them why it's so dangerous?" Asked Adelaide.

"All we know so far, is the name." Said Laura.

"And that it'll mean spending time in Munich." Added Tim.

"David is still recuperating from being wounded." Said Nathalie. "Gen has his notes though, and she's been involved in the matter since joining us. I'll get her to sit with us and give Laura and Tim a full briefing. No point in sending them to Munich, without knowing the full picture."

So, Genevieve hadn't left after all. It wasn't something Laura kept notes on, but Gen had to have outlasted several of her predecessors. Plus she'd volunteered for duty in Jerusalem, which had to be respected.

"Will Gen be joining us in Munich?" Asked Laura.

"I hadn't intended her to be part of your team." Muttered Nathalie.

"She could be useful.....Worth considering sending her." Said Adelaide.

Gen arrived, with a laptop under one arm and carrying a bulging leather briefcase.

"I brought everything I have on paper." Said Gen. "The bulk of the history and issues involved, are on the system. I can get at them from my laptop."

"How do you fancy going with Laura and Tim to Munich, Gen?" Asked Nathalie. "They seem to think you might be useful."

"A good hotel and lots of room service." Said Laura. "I'm sure it'll be hard work, but it will also be fun, I promise."

"I suppose my sister could feed my cat for me, while I'm away." Said Gen.

"If you say no, you'll always regret it." Said Tim.

"Fine.....I've never been to Munich." Said Gen.

"Alright, that's agreed then.....Gen will be going with you." Said Nathalie. "Now we must get down to business, I've an eleven o'clock meeting with finance. Tell them a little of the history of the hand, Gen. Give them a feel for its very troubled history."

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No being dropped off outside by Noah, he was no longer just her driver; he was part of Clara's team. The car was left in the staff area of the car park and they entered the headquarters of 'Cyril's Petit Champignon.' The old enamelled metal sign was still on the outside wall and probably always would be.

'Everything we sell is 100% Organic and Vegan.'

No arguing about it, Cyril's idea to create fake meat products from various types of fungi had been pure genius. The fake meat empire had often required the criminal empire to fund it. That had been in the early years. Now Cyril's famous fake meat products were making large profits. Doing so well that the company was paying embarrassing amounts of tax. There was also the huge plus that the money was clean....No laundering required.

"I've wondered about it a few times." Said Noah. "Why doesn't Cyril go completely legit? He can't need the criminal side of his empire any longer."

"Many have wondered about that." Said Clara. "I actually asked him. He gets bored with the legit food company; it almost runs itself these days. He needs and craves the excitement of the other side of his business empire, the illegal side."

"He likes the dark side." Said Noah.



“Exactly.”

There were moans from the women behind the front desk; Clara hadn't brought her son in to see them. She could hardly tell them that a minor war in Jerusalem had stopped her bringing him in. There were promises that they'd see Justin soon. Clara made a mental note to really bring her son in, within the next couple of weeks. Noah waited until they were in the lift, before asking.

“Is Cyril completely alright with Rory being dealt with ?” Asked Noah.

Dealt with was such a saccharin word, when you meant killed, murdered, or sent to feed the fishes. Vampires were usually more direct and tended to use dead and killed. Clara only used dealt with in crowded public places.

“Yes, absolutely not a problem.” Said Clara. “Cyril is getting darker as he gets older. His only moan was that I hadn't tortured Rory before killing him.”

“Wow, I never usually see that side of him.” Said Noah. “I thought the rough stuff was a last resort for Cyril.”

“Oh, no.....Cyril quite likes a bit of violence.” Said Clara.

The large office where the lifts took you on the top floor, was never empty. Today there was a guy called Tony there, who was quite happy to carry an unconcealed shotgun. No doubt he was officially a farmer, who needed a shotgun to keep the pests under control. There'd be at least another six guys in nearby rooms, all armed. Maybe not armed to the teeth, but heaven help anyone who arrived looking for trouble.

“Is he in a good mood today, Tony ?” Asked Clara.

“Yes, the new branch in Whitby is doing well.” Said Tony. “They seem to like Fungi burgers up north.”

That was it with Tony, one quick comment and he was back to watching an old movie on a flat screen that almost covered one wall. The old building had been a bit scruffy in places, no TV screens there. Clara liked the new building, but the old one had possessed a certain charm. The door to Cyril's office was slightly ajar, which meant knock and enter. Clara walked in, hoping that Noah was about to get some very good news. Cyril had told her he needed to think about it. Today was the day, when he'd promised to promote Noah to manager of the Luna Blue, or keep him as a driver and occasional armed hard man.

“Can we come in, Cyril ?” Clara asked.

“Yes, of course.....Did you hear the good news from Whitby ?” Asked Cyril Carter.

“Tony said the new branch was doing well.” Said Noah.

“Doing better than Southport.” Said Cyril. “I was told they'd never eat fake meat burgers up north.”

“It really is wonderful news.” Said Clara.

There wasn't just coffee on the large table near the window. There was a huge box of doughnuts and many other baked treats. That was a good sign; Cyril only ever bought treats, if she was in his good books. It made it more likely that Noah would soon be manager of the Luna Blue.

“The doughnuts have been driving me crazy.” Said Cyril. “I nearly started on them before you arrived.”

Clara noticed something as Noah sat down at the table. He winced a little and slowed down, to be careful as he sat. He'd been shot in Colindale of course and despite Mabina fixing him up, he still had to be feeling stiff and sore. Slowing down because you're sore, can get you killed. Clara really hoped that Noah would soon be sat behind a desk at the Luna Blue.

“Grab a doughnut.....Drink the coffee.” Said Cyril. “Today is less about business and more about rewarding someone who deserves it.”



Cyril threw two stapled sets of documents onto the desk in front of Noah. Not that Clara had mentioned him being up for the job. She'd merely mentioned there being the likelihood of a bonus; a reward for Noah's bravery and loyalty. If Cyril was looking for a genuinely shocked face from Noah, it was there.

"We both need to sign.....Then you get your copy." Said Cyril. "Once I just told people they had the job. Now the bullies in HR insist that I do it all by the book."

Once Cyril had signed his copy, Clara grabbed it to read. Noah wasn't a temporary manager, or an interim manager; he was being made full time manager of the Luna Blue, the best restaurant, nightclub in Cyril's empire.

"Wow, I wasn't expecting this." Said Noah.

"I can see that by the look on your face." Said Cyril.

It was good money and far less going out armed in the middle of the night. There'd always be some rough stuff, it went with the territory. Managing the Luna Blue would lessen them though, the chances of Noah getting a bullet somewhere vital. Clara grabbed the largest doughnut she could see in the box.

"Lots of chocolate and sprinkles.....My favourite." Said Clara.

"Thank you Cyril." Said Noah. "I won't let you down.....This is the kind of job I've always wanted."

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Niña had been given the job by Clara, which had really pleased her. Not that the young vampire being given house security to upgrade, was music to everyone's ears. She'd need to work with Ronnie and she'd known Clara for a very long time. There was a definite attitude there, but Niña was confident she could work round that. Then there was Mabina, who'd be a major part of helping to strengthen the house defences to keep Justin Ned Atherton safe. Actually, to keep them all safe during those long and dark winter nights. There was attitude from Mabina, who obviously thought she should have been supervising everything.

"Mabina is great, wonderful." Clara had said. "She wants to be a full time senior nurse with her local hospital. Again, great and wonderful, but Justin's safety can't come second to that. You'll need to be very diplomatic about it, but I want you to run the house.....Officially this time. First thing will be to sort out those damned drainpipes."

Niña saw it as being given a job she was already doing. There was a car though, Clara had promised Niña her very own car to get the shopping and use as her own personal transport. Not second hand off a car front either, which had impressed Ronnie. Brochures had turned up, for various makes and models. Niña had become genuinely excited when Clara said the choice of car was hers. Niña quite fancied a sporty Fiat hybrid and it was within the price range Clara had agreed. Niña had never heard of cars until quite recently, but now she was hooked on the sporty Fiat.

"Can I sack the previous builders?" Niña had asked. "They left weapon length pieces of scaffolding pipes lying in the garden."

"Jim knew them, but I've no problem with you replacing them." Clara had said. "Find someone good, with better references than one of our friends knowing them. I've given you a good budget for maintenance and security, so get someone good and regularly check on their progress."

And her pay for running the Hornsey house? There had always been bed and board of course, but the money arriving in her bank account, had always felt like a.....The clergy used the word stipend; a fixed amount to help cover food, clothing and other costs. Her new arrangement with Clara was a proper wage.....The amount had quite shocked her. All in all, it was worth sucking up to Ronnie and Mabina, to make sure they were a help and not a hindrance.



"And I can't have pieces of pipe lying around." Said Niña. "There's a young child in the house.....The gardens must be safe places."

Niña was currently keeping an eye on two builders sent by Finsbury Park Home Security. Not the most expensive company Niña had found on the web, but their reviews looked genuine; she'd actually called three of them. The two men in overalls were working on a quote to fix and improve on the mess the previous people had left behind. Tony and Emre had arrived in immaculate blue overalls. Tony was the older guy and obviously the boss. He was currently waving about the piece of pipe Patsy had taken off the recent would-be car thieves.

"The previous people actually left this in the garden ?" Asked Tony. "It's like a ready-made metal club."

"It gets worse.....One of the windows they installed fell apart during a gale." Said Niña.

That was a little unfair; the local radio station had called it the storm of the century. That particular storm was also likely to have been caused by the birth of Clara's baby, though she still wouldn't admit it.

"Cowboys.....I hate to say it about anyone in our trade, but there are some cowboys in the building industry." Said Tony.

Tony had been charm itself and now he was agreeing with everything she said. Despite knowing it was all part of the plan to sign her up, it was still irresistible.

"The drain pipes are the most urgent fix." Said Niña. "Like a climbing frame for burglars."

"Don't worry, we can deal with that." Said Tony.

Their references may have been good, but they were strangers in the house. Justin was upstairs, being looked after by his mother. Niña was going to stick with the builders, until she waved them goodbye in their truck.

"Can we see the flat roof you mentioned on the phone ?" Asked Tony.

"Yes.....The baby is in that room, but his mother won't mind." Said Niña.

It meant going through the back door, down the hallway and up the main stairs. Not that Tony seemed in a hurry and Emre had only spoken twice since being there and one of those times was to ask to use the bathroom.

"Lovely house." Said Tony, as they went upstairs.

"It will be, once the building work is put right." Said Niña.

There was something, almost as if Karkengara had his head part in and part out of a wall. It was on the landing where Laura and Tim had a bedroom, when they were in Hornsey. Not a head, but something had briefly entered the house, before quickly vanishing again. Luckily, Niña had been surprised so often by Karkengara, that she didn't react.

"This is it, the top floor nursery." Said Niña. "I'll introduce you to Clara and her child."

"We'll try not to disturb her and her baby for too long." Said Tony.

It was a question of what sort of mood was Clara in, before asking her to look after the builders for a few minutes. Luckily Clara was happy to gush about her baby. When Emre talked about his girlfriend being five months pregnant, Niña knew she could push her luck a little.

"Can I leave Tony and Emre with you for a while, Clara ?" Asked Niña. "I forgot something I have to do.....I shouldn't be long."

"No problem, take as long as you like." Said Clara.

Down to Laura's landing and Niña began touching the wall, where something had made itself known, if only for a few seconds. There was a tingle in one part of a solid wall. New-ish wallpaper, which meant the wall hadn't simply been left alone for decades.



"Talk to me wall, show me your secrets." Muttered Niña. "I promise not to tell anyone."

She ran her fingers slowly over where the tingle was strongest. Niña jumped back, when her fingers sank deep into the wall. It wasn't finding an empty void which had scared her. There was something beyond the wall, something that moved as her hand brushed over it.

"Fuck." Muttered Niña.

"I wouldn't disturb it." Said Karkengara. "There are safe ways to wake up such entities and prodding it isn't one of them."

He made her jump, he nearly always did. A head the size of a small car and the bringer of fire could arrive without making a sound. Whatever was in the wall was obviously known about. The obvious question was why no one had told her about it.

"No one told me about an entity in the walls." Said Niña.

"Oh, Laura told me about the extra rooms." Said Karkengara. "Not used now of course.....links to another reality really. I suppose you could go there, but I don't recommend it."

"Does Clara know about these strange rooms?" Asked Niña.

"Yes, she used them to watch Simon once, though that was a while ago." Said Karkengara. "Everyone knew about the rooms and that they'd been locked away for reasons of safety. I'll say it again.....I wouldn't recommend entering any of them."

"But you could open the way for me?" Asked Niña.

"I knew it.....Young vampires are always braver than is good for them."

Was he baiting her? It seems exactly the thing to say, to guarantee she'd insist on entering the locked away rooms. The test was to see how easily he'd let himself be persuaded to open the rooms for her. Of course, locked away parts of the house; didn't explain the entity she'd touched.

"Of course.....I'll understand if you're afraid of the entity who guards the way." Said Niña.

"Afraid.....The bringer of fire is afraid on no one." Said Karkengara.

"Prove it, open the way for me." Said Niña.

Would she be able to get back? Asking would sound like weakness and fear. Supposing she vanished in the locked away rooms? Clara might think she was dead and not look for her. As she suspected, the bringer of fire hardly needed his arm twisted to agree.

"Very well, Niña.....I will give you access to the rooms." Said Karkengara.

Too easy, Niña could already hear Clara talking about the vampire girl who'd simply vanished one morning. Karkengara muttered a few words which Niña didn't understand. The wall didn't vanish or anything like that. There was a door now, a simple wooden door where there hadn't been one before. Niña reached for the door handle.

"No not yet.....Young vampires, you're all so impetuous." Said Karkengara. "I need to let the guardian know you now live here; that you're no threat to the house."

More muttering in a weird and, to Niña, unknown language. The bringer of fire even breathed on the door, but he did it with a cool breath.

"Now.....It is safe to enter." Said Karkengara. "The door will be there on the other side. When you want to return, simply open the door."

"What about the guardian entity?" Asked Niña.

"You may see something, but it is now harmless." Said the bringer of fire.

Karkengara had been a God once, on a different world, in another slightly shifted reality. If he said the entity was harmless, it was harmless. Only the 'you might see something,' left her mildly concerned. Niña opened the door and saw a hallway. Not well lit, it was full of shadows cast by old fashioned oil lamps, which hung from the walls.



"Here I go.....Wish me luck." Said Niña.

"Good luck." Said Karkengara.

Niña began to walk down the corridor full of dark shadows. She hadn't realised the door behind her had closed, until she turned to look at it. Tempting to try and open it again, but she trusted Karkengara. If he said it would open again, it would open.

"If Laura was here, she'd choose the first door on the left." She muttered.

Niña opened the door a fraction, which caused something she couldn't see; to begin screaming. The screams were loud, as if some poor living thing had been dropped into a raging fire. The screaming only stopped when she closed the door.

"Well.....Not a good start." She muttered.

Niña was nervous about trying the next door on the left of the hallway. The door opened without any screaming beginning. More oil lamps on the walls, giving the room a yellow look, like jaundiced flesh. There was a cupboard on the far side of the room, which Niña decided to open. It was full of drawings of a Florentine garden in the spring. She knew where the garden was because they were her drawings.

"I wondered where these had ended up." Niña mumbled.

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