

Clara Copley

(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 12 – Timelines & Minions

“Most betrayed partners had ways of getting revenge on the other woman. Clara was a vampire with the occasional anger management problem. Patsy wasn't scared of Clara, but there had been times when sleeping with Simon, had felt like an extreme sport.” – Festina Lente Chapter 4

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Clara Copley followed Simon along the riverbank in Grizzana. He'd told her they didn't really exist to anyone they might see. At least ghosts often had a visible presence, but they were just borrowing a timeline for a day. Invisible entities, they walked across the bridge and towards a house which stood some distance from the rest of the village.

“I have no idea who owns this house.” Said Simon. “It may well vanish when we've finished using it.”

“It felt so long since I'd seen you.” Said Clara. “I hear your voice though and it feels as though we were never apart.”

Simon smiled at her, as he opened the door to the house. It was light inside; all the window shutters had been opened. A very similar feel to the house Simon had once shared with Giovanni; even the furniture was the same style.

“At least this time, we're not meeting in a grubby old barn.” Said Clara.

“I'm told there's food in the pantry and a comfortable bed.” Said Simon. “If we go in that direction of course; I'm assuming nothing.”

It was her turn to smile without saying anything. Did she want to sleep with Simon ? He had been the love of her life for a very long time and he was the father of her child. It wasn't as if Noah was definitely going to last. He was her type and so far at least, the sex had been incredible. Was that enough for her to say no to a night in a comfy bed with Simon ? The house in Hornsey felt like hers now, as did the job working for Cyril. Then there were all the people she now thought of as her family. Clara hated to admit it, but she felt settled into her current life.

“You mentioned food.....I'm feeling fairly hungry.” Said Clara.

“Let's explore the pantry together.”

The large pantry was in the kitchen. There was a huge marble slab in the pantry, usually the only way to keep anything cool. The minions appeared to have been busy though, the pantry felt about the same temperature as the fridge in Hornsey.

“Wonderful.....Perfectly chilled food in the age of the Medici.” Said Clara.

“The minions said we'd be looked after.” Said Simon.

“Be nice to a Djinn and respect an ancient statue of Artemis.” Said Clara. “That seems to be the way to be spoiled by minions of the Gods.”

“I suspect saving Jerusalem from destruction, had a part in it.” Said Simon.

“Of course.....One of the oldest cities in the world.” Said Clara. “Considered to be holy by all three major religions. Oh wow, these tomatoes look delicious.”

Clara recognised all the food, yet it looked so different from what she bought in the local supermarkets in Hornsey. Even the plates and utensils looked different. Clara filled a plate with her favourite things that didn't actually require any cooking.

"There's some decent red wine too." Said Simon. "Unless you think it's too early for alcohol?"

"This is a day with no rules, Simon." Said Clara. "Fill our glasses with the decent red."

At first it felt strange, to be eating a classic Mediterranean lunch for breakfast. Add on the truly excellent wine and it felt even stranger. The strangeness quickly passed though, as did Clara's reserve. It was Simon after all; would sex with him really be that weird? It wasn't as if there was any chance of it being a regular thing. Just sex with an ex, which she'd done a few times before. She'd even ditched Felipe, the Brazilian bike courier; only to go back out with him several months later. Clara made a point of touching Simon's hand, every time she reached for something.

"Leave enough space for dessert.....It's cheesecake." Said Simon.

For a moment Clara looked into Simon's eyes and she remembered so many wonderful times from their past. There had been a few bad times; every couple has some of those. On the whole though, their years together had been some of the best times of her life.

"I know I'm being a slut." Said Clara. "But we could take the cheesecake into the bedroom? Only if you like the idea? I am hoping you like the idea."

"That sounds a really nice idea." Said Simon. "There are things I need to tell you. I can tell you now, or I can tell you later. It's your choice."

"Tell me later, but don't forget to tell me." Said Clara.

"I won't."

Clothes began to come off as they went up the stairs and they'd forgotten to take the cheesecake with them. They hit the bed naked and the sex was like two oversexed teenagers. A good solid, wood frame, double bed. It actually rattled as they had a lot of hard, energetic sex. At one point, Simon went downstairs and returned with wine, two glasses and the cheesecake.

"Well, Simon Atherton." Said Clara. "This is a bit better than that crap bedsit you used to have in Gravesend."

"That building survived the war.....Show it some respect." Said Simon.

"The Boer war?"

"Yeah.....Very funny."

The sex continued until they were both satisfied, which took several hours. By the time they were eating warm cheesecake, it was time for Simon to say what needed to be said.

"Djehuty has an offer for you, a way of rewarding what was achieved." Said Simon. "The Ancient Gods are pleased with the way matters were handled in the Old City of Jerusalem."

"Come on Atherton.....Out with it." Said Clara. "What are they giving me? I quite fancy a gold statue for my bedside table. Something old fashioned looking and worth a fortune."

He was looking at her with a rare seriousness, as though it was all incredibly important. Maybe they were going to give her something priceless and made of gold.

"You get to live with me again, in Italy." Said Simon. "Italy at the time of the Medici. Justin comes too of course, though he's still a baby. He'll soon have no memories of twenty first century London. The offer of Djehuty is for you and our son to live with me here, forever. No changing your mind, it's definitely a one way transfer. Well, what do you think?"

When Justin had just been born, Clara would have given a limb to have had that kind of opportunity. Back with Simon, the vampire father of her child. Now though.....She needed a chance to think about all the life permutations of Djehuty's offer. She'd have been lying if she said the moving to Italy offer hadn't crossed her mind. It all seemed so less clear cut, than if the offer had arrived just after Justin Ned Atherton had come into the world.

“Forgive me for being unsure.” Said Clara. “There must be somewhere we can go for a walk. We need.....I need to talk this over, before I make up my mind.”

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Patsy Smart was less familiar with the lilac robed minions than Clara, but she had seen them before. When several of them began fussing around the Hornsey house, Patsy assumed they were there for Laura. After all, Laura had once been a friend of the Ancient Egyptian Gods. The minions floated through walls and had a look at everyone who was in the house. Niña seemed to fascinate them for some reason. Probably because the female vampire was outside of her own timeline, but thriving. Thriving; a word Mabina used so much about Baby Justin that they were all using it. As for the minions ? They looked, they floated about.....But they said nothing.

“If you want Laura ? She’s in Jerusalem.” Said Patsy. “She’s staying at the American Colony hotel.” More floating and Karkengara must have picked up an unusual vibe from the Hornsey house. He turned up, or at least his enormous dragon head made an appearance. The minions seemed to like the bringer of fire; there was a lot of stroking and muttering at him. For his part, Karkengara seemed to enjoy their attention. When one of the minions spoke to her, it was quite a shock.

“Time is rarely flexible, Patsy.” Said a minion. “Today you can visit Simon Atherton in his timeline, if you wish it ?”

Did she wish it ? Patsy knew the minions well enough to know that there was no putting anything off for another day. There’d be a gateway of some kind for her, on that particular day. Say no and it was highly unlikely the offer would be repeated.

“Of course I wish it.” Said Patsy.

There was Clara to consider of course, but mentioning her would only muddy the water. Patsy had suffered and survived Clara’s wrath once. She was certain she’d survive it again.

“Conditions are perfect.....We leave now.” Said the minion. “There will be clothes for you to change into. You will be in Florence for a day. Is that acceptable ?”

Say no and all the minions might vanish. They were very literal creatures; at least that was what Laura thought. To Patsy, it all sounded like a wonderful offer. A day with Simon.....She never considered saying no.

“Yes, that is acceptable.” Said Patsy.

“Good.....Never say no to offers from minions.” Said Karkengara.

The minions muttered at one another and just before Patsy asked when they were leaving, she was no longer in Hornsey. No obvious portal, or magical ritual. One moment she was looking at Karkengara, the next she was in a garden and it was raining.

“Oh, get her inside.....Or she’ll catch a chill.” Said Simon Atherton.

He had a cape, which he draped over her shoulders, as he took her into the house. The minions were with them until Patsy stepped into what looked like a kitchen; then the minions all vanished. Simon kissed her and she kissed him back. Passionate kisses, definitely the kind to make Clara angry. It was just a one off though, a present from some Ancient God, who Patsy had probably never met.

“That is so nice, Simon.....But let me catch my breath.” She said.

He laughed and carried on hugging her. It was amazing how thoroughly wet she’d become, from just being out in the rain for a few moments. The minion had mentioned clothing for her to change into.

“You need dry clothes.....There are lots to choose from.” Said Simon.

“Whose house is this ?” Asked Patsy.

“Mine of course.....The minions brought clothes for you.” Said Simon. “Food too.....Neither of us will starve.”

Up several sets of stairs, with many windows to see the garden. One set of stairs gave a view of the road outside the house. There was a church on the corner and suddenly Patsy was very aware of being in Florence at the time of the Medici. The church was beautiful, but everything about it screamed of history and age. No cars was the biggest clue and the number of horse drawn vehicles. All the people outside the church, looked to have been dressed for a historical pageant. It was all real though, including their obvious annoyance at being drenched by a sudden downpour.

"Oh, Simon.....You live here and everything is so beautiful." Said Patsy.

"Yes.....I suppose I take it all for granted."

The bedroom they entered had a definite female feel to it, even without the dresses strewn across the bed and piles of women's clothing on chairs. It was the drawings on the wall and a slight, but familiar scent in the air.

"I recognise the scent.....This used to be Niña's room." Said Patsy.

"Yes.....She drew all the pictures on the wall." Said Simon. "I'll leave you to choose some clothes and change."

It all became a little confusing after that, at least for a moment or two. Patsy asked Simon to stay and help her choose a dress. Simon had kissed her and quite soon, they were both naked on the bed. Were there servants ? Was there a girlfriend who might come home ? All that was forgotten, as Patsy enjoyed sex with Simon. It had been so long since they'd been together. As Patsy grabbed a clean white blouse, to wipe the sweat from her face; she had to ask the obvious question.

"Should we lock the bedroom door ?" She asked.

It was asking if there was anybody else likely to arrive in the house, without actually asking it.

"No.....We're the only people in the house today." Said Simon.

Who tasted who first never became an argument, though Patsy told Simon that he'd tasted her first. No matter how experienced a woman might be, she never becomes blasé about a good looking man using his tongue between her legs. Simon had definitely started the second session. There was one halt.....To go to the kitchen for food.

"I'd forgotten we hadn't eaten.....I'm starving." Said Patsy.

"Me too.....I can cook up a bacon sandwich if you like ?" Asked Simon. "The minions have left the kitchen capable of anything. It'll be taken away of course, but there's an electric grill."

"Oh yes, one of your famous bacon sandwiches.....Two rounds please." Said Patsy.

The sandwiches were perfect, real classic bacon sarnies; the minions had even put a bottle of brown sauce in the pantry. It made Patsy wonder what they ate when at home, assuming the minions had a home somewhere. All the foods of the multiverse to choose from. They had to eat incredibly well, or incredibly badly. There could be no middle ground.

"I have something important to ask you, Patsy." Said Simon. "An offer you might have heard hinted at by the minions."

"If they hinted at anything.....I never heard it." Said Patsy.

Poor Simon, he had the face of a man who thought she might say no, to whatever he was about to ask. There was very little she might say no to, but she liked him being a little on the back foot.

"Before I ask, there's something else." Said Simon. "Do you still love me ?"

"Of course I do, you idiot." Said Patsy. "I probably always will. Now ask me what you want to ask ?"

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Niña heard a sound upstairs in the Hornsey house, where no sounds should have been coming from. Ronnie was sat with Baby Justin, there was always someone watching him round the clock. Mabina

was expected, but hadn't arrived yet. That left the bringer of fire, but Karkengara hadn't mentioned being in the house that night.

"I bet it's Laura and her Gudara." Muttered Niña. "Come to get a few more holiday clothes for Jerusalem."

No yelling out, Clara had made that a rule. If a house full of vampires couldn't sense someone in the house without yelling.....Etc etc. It was about the time when if Baby Justin was woken up, it took hours for him to settle down again. Niña felt the house, the way the poorly sighted feel braille. There she was, rummaging through Clara's room. Not a problem, it was Clara rummaging about in her own room.

"Ahhh.....Right idea about clean holiday clothes." Muttered Niña. "I just got the wrong vampire."

Niña had to go and see her of course. The lady of the house returned from Jerusalem. Probably temporary while grabbing clean clothes, but there was still a huge potential to hear juicy gossip. Niña ran up the stairs, to be standing at Clara's bedroom door, just a few seconds after having the idea. At first Niña was startled by the women in lilac robes. Even in the few years Niña had been a vampire, she'd seen a few minions. They were the ones who repaired damage to the multiverse and gathered up broken threads of poorly maintained timelines. It was said, probably accurately; that without the minions of the Gods, the multiverse would collapse into nothingness.

"Clara.....I have some of your summer things, drying in the laundry room." Said Niña.

Laundry room indeed, it was just another part of the basement.

"I've found enough clothes for now." Said Clara. "I'll probably be in Jerusalem for a few extra days; there has been a huge event in my life."

"Why ? What happened ?" Asked Niña.

"I need to tell Niña.....Do we have time ?" Clara asked a minion.

"Yes, we'll give you some privacy." Said one of the lilac robed women. "Call me when you're ready to leave."

Clara seemed less urgent, less intent on filling a weekend case with lingerie, skirts and blouses. The minions had gone somewhere to await Clara's call, which massively reduced the stress level in Clara's bedroom.

"Sit on my bed.....I'd rather you heard it from me." Said Clara.

Niña sat on the corner of the bed, wondering what huge event had occurred to Clara. It had to be something truly momentous, if it involved minions of the Gods.

"Firstly, this doesn't affect this being your home, Niña." Said Clara. "You're Niña Copley on all your documents and to me.....You are my sister. This house will be your home for as long as you want it to be here. The room under the stairs will always be yours."

It was all so nice, the kind of thing Niña had dreamt of hearing Clara say to her. It was the timing though and the minions; it was all making Niña very nervous.

"You're scaring me, Clara." Said Niña. "Tell me.....What has happened ?"

"I saw Simon, even though I was told it was impossible." Said Clara. "I couldn't work out if I was a reward for him, or he was a reward for me. Whatever the reason the Ancient Gods had.....Simon wanted me to live with him, in that timeline; Florence at the time of the Medici. Our son would go with me of course, but there would be no returning to modern day London."

"I understand now." Said Niña. "Don't worry, we'll all learn to cope without you.....We'll have to."

"Simon asked if I still loved him." Said Clara. "I do.....Of course I do, I probably always will. I said no to going Florence though. This house is my home now, the centre of my life with Justin. Everyone who comes here feels like family. I'm staying here."

"You really said no to Simon ?" Asked Niña.

Their love was almost legendary. When Laura was feeling a bit bitchy, she joked about bards writing songs about the great love between Clara and Simon. It was what Clara wanted, yet she'd said no. For a moment, it felt like the world had stopped spinning.

"I did.....I said no to Simon." Said Clara. "I believe he can now make the offer to Patsy, if he wishes to. I have no idea if she'll accept."

"Patsy.....Aren't you angry about that ?" Asked Niña.

"Maybe just a little." Said Clara. "Simon deserves to be happy though and if Patsy can help with that.....I don't begrudge either of them a little happiness. Of course, she may say no."

"Wow.....You weren't joking about a huge event in your life." Said Niña.

"When I get back from Jerusalem, we'll talk more about the future." Said Clara. "I heard about the trouble with hooligans trying to steal my car. We will finally do something about those drainpipes." Hooligans.....Niña hadn't been in modern day London for long, but even she would never use the word hooligans. Clara seemed ideal for life in fifteenth century Florence. It still seemed strange that she'd said no to Simon. On the other hand, Niña was glad she had. The Hornsey house wouldn't have been the same without Clara and Justin Ned Atherton. Out of nowhere came the need to hug Clara, while she was still shoving clothes into her weekend case.

"I am so glad you didn't go." Said Niña.

"So am I, Niña.....So am I." Said Clara.

Clara called for the minions and she vanished with them. They'd be taking her to the hotel in Jerusalem and Noah. Noah Williams was his full name, though he was just Noah to most. Niña only knew his full name because she'd once borrowed a debit card from him, to buy some shopping. Would he last with Clara ? Niña wasn't sure, but she hoped he did. The Hornsey house badly needed a period of stability.

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Simon Atherton knew he'd been lucky to have had a chance to make the offer to Patsy Smart. He'd been a little surprised when she'd said yes. She had to be told Clara had said no, that was only fair. It seemed Patsy loved him too much to say no to the offer. She was going to live in fifteenth century Florence with him, when they weren't travelling the globe. Part of the deal was helping Simon, being his companion as he searched for the great secret, the true meaning of Festina Lente – Make haste slowly. They were currently stood in the garden of the house in Florence, watching the dusk gradually turn to night.....

"The minions emptied my flat." Said Patsy. "They brought everything, including my vinyl records and the machine I played them on. No power here of course.....I also have a toaster and a hairdryer I can never use. I bet there are lots more electrical items we'll need to throw out. One of the ladies in lilac said it was simpler and quicker to bring everything here."

Patsy didn't seem to be moaning, she actually laughed when talking about having an expensive hair dryer, but nowhere to plug it in. Simon could remember his own culture shock, when he arrived in a timeline with no electricity and oil lamps as just about the only way to light his house at night.

"The filter coffee machine was my big moment of disappointment." Said Simon. "I'd have given anything to have been able to use it here. There are ways though, tricks to get around the lack of electricity. For many purposes, the heat from kitchen ovens will do the job."

"I'll learn, Simon." Said Patsy. "I'm looking upon the fifteenth century as a wonderful learning experience."

Later he'd tell her they were in the sixteenth century, but that could wait. There were so many other things to tell her. Poor Patsy, she was developing into a bit of a techie back in London. A techie with no power sockets in the wall. He was beginning to feel sorry for her.

"Come on; show me how to turn on the ovens." Said Patsy. "We may as well cook the food we brought, before it goes off. Life without a refrigerator.....It's going to be interesting."

The ovens were wood burners, which made Patsy raise her eyebrows again. They put wood in the burners and soon the kitchen was full of warmth on a cool night.

"Oh, I love that.....The smell of burning wood and the warmth." Said Patsy.

"Normally there's servants to do this." Said Simon. "I'm hoping you only need to use the oven, if you really want to. On hot summer days, the nice warmth can quickly become unbearable."

"Servants.....I'm beginning to see the advantages to living here." Said Patsy. "My mum would hate it of course.....A card carrying socialist is my mum."

Poor Evangeline Smart, Patsy's mother, Evie to friends and family. Then there was Zeus, her cat. Neither of them could come to Florence, but there were plans being put in place to look after them. Not that Zeus needed much looking after. A large black and white male cat, with the ability to take on the size and ferocity of a tiger. Zeus had already looked after Evie by terrifying burglars.

"Talking of Evie." Said Simon. "The minions spoke to Mabina and she'll look after your mum, when she's able. Laura loves your mum and she's aware that Zeus is a long way from being an ordinary cat. Between them, they'll make sure Evangeline Smart and her pet, are safe, well fed and kept warm in winter."

"I'm glad mum will be safe." Said Patsy. "I still feel guilty for moving into my own flat, but she could be very difficult. All in all, her being looked after in London, while I'm in Florence; feels just about perfect."

They hugged, it seemed the perfect moment to hug. Patsy would remember things over the next few days, things only possible where there was a reliable electricity supply. There would be arguments and a lot of her learning to put up with things. In the end, when they were on a ship to Cyrenaica; none of the current problems would matter.

"There's plenty of chicken, peppers and rice." Said Simon. "Bread too, that we can warm up. Not everything should go in an oven, but getting it nice and hot seems to be the main thing."

"Hot enough so we don't poison ourselves." Said Patsy. "I'm game.....The chicken looks delicious." There was some salad out of Patsy's fridge in her flat. Getting the minions not to bring the fridge, or the washing machine, had been hard work. They didn't seem to understand that electrical appliances were useless; in a world with no mains power. If it looked big, flashy and expensive, they wanted to bring it.

"This is all so fresh.....I wish the minions did daily deliveries." Said Simon.

"No pity party, Simon." Said Patsy. "You just admitted to having servants to do all the hard work." No one had seen Patsy yet of course, none of his servants and his friends who seemed to treat his house as their own. The real fun would begin when he had to explain where Patsy was from and why she kept moaning about there being no electricity. Explaining electricity would be the next tricky subject. They were just about finished eating, when Simon decided that Patsy's first night in his house, wasn't an appropriate time to make assumptions about sleeping arrangements.

"Before it gets dark.....You can have Niña's old room if you like." Said Simon. "We can buy you new sheets and get it redecorated. Or we can make my room.....Our room. The bed is fairly new and there's lots of wardrobe space. I'm hoping you like that idea, but it will be your decision."

They kissed, or rather Patsy kissed him. All the good memories came back, of spending nights with her in a seedy bed and breakfast in Holloway. There was something wonderful about seedy hotels, where every stain on the bedding was a mystery.

"Of course I want to share a bed with you, Simon." Said Patsy.

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Laura hadn't appreciated being woken up in the early hours of the morning. Judging by his mood, Tim hadn't thought much of it either. Orders from Nathalie Aurigny it seemed, though she wasn't actually there in person. If they found the vault though and managed to open it; Nathalie wanted to be brought to the vault by Laura's Gudara. Laura blamed herself and her habit of making throw away comments. There were consequences to such things, there were always consequences. Laura had mentioned seeing a vault, while leaving the Psochic base. Deep in the bowels of their headquarters, the vault door had still looked solid and secure. Of course, it might have been destroyed since she'd last seen it. That throw away comment about a vault door, had caused Tim and her to be woken at a ridiculous hour, to return to an underground base she had hoped to never see again.....

"Isn't that Barzani ?" Asked Tim. "We never did see him during the battle. I assumed he'd been injured.....Or maybe killed."

"No, Nathalie kept him in Brittany as a reserve." Said Laura.

"Could be useful, someone full awake." Said Tim. "I feel as though I could sleep for year.....And everywhere aches."

Barzani, lifelong friend of Amir. He'd been added to the Jerusalem team because he was supposed to be the best special-ops guy the Silver Dawn had on their payroll. He might get tested, if they came across any living Psochics. So far, every Psochic they'd come across deep underground, was dead. Sadly, they'd also come across a few dead Silver Dawn fighters.

"Pick up the pace, people." Said David Huynh. "But be careful."

Which sounded a little contradictory to Laura. Fighters could move carefully, or they could move quickly. Rarely had she known them to do both. Not that Laura would say anything. They were all suffering from deep fatigue, including David.

"Are you sure the vault is this way, Laura ?" Asked David. "These are the rooms where the servants lived and slept. I can't see anything priceless being kept here."

"Which makes it the perfect place to put something priceless." Said Laura. "These are the right passages and rooms. Not far now, if the vault is still in one piece."

A huge statue of Artemis had a lot of strength. More than enough to bring the ceiling down in places. Destroying a vault would have been very easy, just one good hit from a fist made of solid stone.

"Do you know what might be in the vault, Laura ?" Asked Barzani.

"I was told not to gossip about what it might hold." Someone said.

There were a dozen of them, including Silver Dawn fighters Laura had never seen before. Nathalie had obviously included a few keep quiet instructions in her orders. Not that Laura felt any need to keep her thoughts to herself.

"My first guess would be a complete and undamaged copy of the Psochic Bible." Said Laura.

"We have the Samuel Westcott version in Brittany." Said David. "That is full of errors and whole sections have been removed. I can see how excited Nathalie would be at the idea of finding a complete and accurate version."

"If there is such a thing.....This is where it will be, the Psochic base." Said Barzani.

"I helped find the Westcott version; it was buried with him in his tomb." Said Laura. "Everyone thought Westcott had a complete copy, but that turned out to be not the case. A genuine complete copy of the Psochic bible, really would be priceless."

There were no lights in the tunnels and passages, the electricity supply had ended after the statue of Artemis had brought down huge parts of the building. Laura didn't mind trudging along with just a flashlight to show her the way. Some of the Silver Dawn fighters were getting agitated though; she could feel their anxiety coming off them in waves.

"There.....The bronze coloured door." Said Laura.

There was a little rubble in front of it, but the door looked solid. Made of a very tough metal, the only way into the vault was to open the door, preferably with a key. Luckily, when Nathalie had sent Barzani, she'd given him a very serious looking metal key.

"Time to find out if this key works." Said Barzani. "According to whoever fought and killed the Psochic head cleric, this key gives entry to the chamber of wonders. I'm hoping that means this vault."

"Chamber of wonders." Muttered David. "Clerics always come up with fancy names for places like this."

Laura took the key from Barzani and tried it on the lock. At first it refused to turn, until she tried turning it counter clockwise. No timid clunk, there was a loud clang as the lock disengaged. Laura stood there for a moment, wondering if an anti-theft device might be about to go off.

"Well.....I'm still here." Said Laura. "That must be a good sign."

Everyone laughed, as Laura pulled on the door's solid looking handle. The door swung open, to reveal a vault that went back a good thirty feet into the wall. There were books on some of the shelves, real epic tomes as Old Thomas would have called them. Some of the shelves had gold objects on them, valuable looking gold artefacts.

"Wow.....Nathalie never mentioned there being gold." Said Barzani.

"I doubt if it ever crossed her mind." Said Laura.

David was still healing from injuries he'd received during the battle. He was slow, much slower than he usually was. If Laura hadn't pulled him out of the way; Barzani's blade would have skewered him through his chest. Laura drew her own blade and glared at Barzani.

"Take the gold if you want." Said Laura. "Nathalie will just want the Psochic bible."

"There's no need for this." Said Tim.

"And leave witnesses." Said Barzani. "There's enough gold for a man to vanish and start a new life. There's only one problem.....There can be no witnesses left alive."

A little more than half the Silver Dawn fighters were loyal and turned on those siding with Barzani. David used his sword, though it was obvious he wasn't ready to fight again. Laura killed Barzani, simply because there was no other option. He seemed intent on killing Tim, her and David. It needed doing, but it was still sad, to see the passage floor covered in their own dead fighters.

"I've known Barzani for years." Said David. "Never would I have guessed he'd turn killer for gold."

"There is a lot of gold on those shelves." Said Tim.

"Enough to tempt anyone." Added David.

Laura stood close to each man who'd stood by them and still breathed. It was only three men. She made all of them swear a fresh allegiance to the Silver Dawn and Nathalie Aurigny. As if not satisfied with that, she glared at them until she felt each one could be trusted. She then went into the vault and came out with a large book in her hands. A truly huge tome, larger than the bibles on the pulpit

of most churches. It was the Psochic bible and judging by the size alone, it was likely to be complete. It definitely showed no sign of damage.

"This is it.....The binding is made of human skin." Said Laura.

"Wonderful.....I hope Nathalie enjoys it." Said David.

"Talking of Nathalie Aurigny. Time to summon my Gudara and bring Nathalie here." Said Laura.

"You're still bringing her here ?" Asked Tim. "This place looks like a slaughterhouse."

"And I know Nathalie has seen far worse.....I won't be long."

She gave the Psochic bible to Tim, rather than carrying it around with her. Nathalie was in Brittany, there shouldn't be a problem. But Laura would have said Barzani was loyal. Laura returned with Nathalie, both of them holding tight onto her Gudara. It was almost a relief to see there had been no fresh fight over the vault full of gold.

"Yes, I see what you mean, Laura." Said Nathalie. "This place after the battle.....I wouldn't house a dog here, even a dog I didn't particularly like."

There was an unpleasant odour, which hinted that all of the dead buried under rubble hadn't been found and removed. The dreadful stench of corruption, which Laura knew all too well.

"Tim has the book.....It looks perfect." Said Laura.

It was as if Nathalie refused to acknowledge the dead bodies all around her. She stepped over Barzani, as if he was just an obstruction in her way. She glanced into the vault, before taking the massive Psochic tome from Tim.

"Wow, human skin as a binding." Said Nathalie. "That alone gives it authenticity. Of course.....The clerics will need to examine it."

Nathalie looked again inside the vault, while still carrying the massive book.

"They do say Psochic gold is tainted, maybe even cursed." Said Nathalie. "We'll leave it here."

All those dead, over what might be cursed gold. Not that Nathalie was always right about such things. Leaving the gold there though, that shouted that the gold was likely to be tainted in some way.

"We should take the dead back to Brittany." Said David. "All the dead.....Even traitors deserve a decent burial."

"Yes, as long as Laura's Gudara can handle that ?" Said Nathalie.

"He's carried worse than a few dead fighters." Said Laura.

Nathalie had to be stronger than she looked. The huge book would have left Tim tired after carrying it for a while. Nathalie clung to it and never once put it down. Once her Gudara had dealt with the dead, Laura took Nathalie to her office in Brittany. The obsession with the book was no act; Nathalie placed it on her desk, as though it was a sacred relic of a saint.

"Your salary is safe, Laura." Said Nathalie. "Come in as you please, there will no more threats to cut you off. Your apartment here is yours for life. Tim too of course, he's now one of the family."

"Thank you, that's appreciated." Said Laura.

"The word priceless is over used." Said Nathalie. "The Psochic bible though, the massive tome you found. That really is priceless, Laura Selway. I'll owe you my gratitude long after my people forget where the book came from."

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