

Simon Atherton

(Season six of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 7 – Ivory Coast

“The chest with the scrolls in it started rattling just after breakfast, on a day which had started off being quite ordinary. So many people had said the chest was important, from Brother Alberti to the deceased Elder Tilder in Cyrenaica. Patsy wasn't surprised that the chest was doing something, but rattling around the cabin she shared with Simon was weird; rather than scary. Patsy had brought Lucia into their room to witness the rattling chest.”

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By the time the Mermaid left Casablanca, they'd found the six new crew members they needed. Not that the inhabitants of the city had instantly taken to them, the Mermaid looked like it had been through a battle or two. Simon was as amazed as anyone that there had been almost a queue to sign on under Captain Galeoto. It was Lucia of all people, saving the life of a young child. Such news spreads fast and the Mermaid quickly went from being a ship with dubious past, to a friend of the good people of Casablanca.

“They've come to wave us off with wishes of good fortune.” Galeoto had said. “That is rare these days, but it's nice when it happens.”

The crew had waved back and Simon had joined in. It was nice to see so many friendly faces, especially as they were the last friendly faces they were to see for quite some time. Once the Mermaid was following the coast of West Africa there were stops for water and whatever food could be foraged from the land. They'd seen local tribespeople, but they hadn't seemed pleased to see them. There had been a lot of waving of weapons and banging shields on the ground. It had been a case of get what they needed and get back on the ship, as quickly as possible. Even then, by the time the chest began rattling, they were getting low on fresh water.

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“Several of the scrolls mention the chest being important.” Said Lucia. “It probably means we're only a day or so from where we need to go ashore on the Ivory Coast.”

Lucia opened the chest and the scrolls inside were vibrating slightly. It was the chest which was rattling as if it wanted every one of its screws and joints to come loose; so it could fall apart. Patsy had already decided that the chest had to be moved before bedtime. There was no way she could sleep through the constant rattling noise.

“I'll get it put in the forward hold, where it won't annoy anyone.” Said Simon.

“Put the scrolls somewhere else.” Said Lucia. “Just in case the chest does fall apart in a destructive way.”

“What do you think will happen, Lucia ?” Asked Patsy.

“Either something will fall out of a hidden place in the chest.” Said Lucia. “Or, the chest will simply stop rattling and remain intact.”

Three days later it was Mia who’d heard the slight bang coming from the forward hold. By then everyone was excited and agitated, by Lucia pointing her arm towards a quite rugged looking coastline.

“Here.....We go ashore here.” Said Lucia. “There will be a village where we can resupply, this I sense; though I have no idea of the name of the village.”

“How far is it to the City of Shadows ?” Asked Simon.

“A few miles, three days travel for a fast walker.” Said Lucia. “We’ll need supplies and the scrolls. Has anyone checked on the rattling chest ?”

Patsy had put the scrolls in a leather bag in the cabin she shared with Simon. Not their leather bag, they had no idea who it had once belonged to; neither did Galeoto. A solid looking bag though, it was perfect for carrying the scrolls to the City of Shadows.

“Crap.....I heard something happen in the forward hold.” Said Mia. “Talk of the City of Shadows took it right out of my mind. I heard a loud pop.....Like an explosion.”

En-masse is an overused expression, as is hurtle, but a large number of their group did kind of hurtle below decks; in the direction of the forward hold.

“I need to go first.....I have the key to the door.” Shouted Simon.

Patsy made sure she was second through the door, while Simon turned up the ever burning lamps in the forward hold. The lamps showed them what remained of the chest and the secret it had once held.

“Now that.....I never expected to see that.” Said Mia.

“The chest has gone.” Said Giovanni. “How could it just vanish ?”

“I’ve seen larger things than that chest vanish.” Said Mia. “Sometimes when I’m looking right at them.”

“It didn’t totally vanish.” Said Juliana.

Patsy had seen the glint of metal too and she was closer to it. She picked up what appeared to be a medallion of some kind, though it wasn’t on a chain. It meant nothing to Patsy, but Lucia knew what it was.

“Put that on the floor, Patsy.” Said Lucia. “Never touch it again and that goes for everyone. It’s a medallion of Borren, leader of the City of Shadows. It’s pure evil.”

Patsy lost interest in the medallion after hearing that. She dropped it and it made a thud as it hit the floor, as though it was something much heavier than a small metal medallion. Patsy had glimpsed the face of a figure in the medallion and she’d have sworn the face was looking at her with hatred; as it hit the floor.

“That does feel like evil.” Said Patsy.

“What do we do with it ?” Asked Giovanni. “We can’t take it around the globe with us.”

“Kill Borren, or you’ll never be free of the evil.” Said Lucia. “Come.....We need to go ashore and begin our journey to the City of Shadows.”

It felt strange to leave something evil on the Mermaid, when most of them were going ashore. Patsy would have liked to drop it over the side and let the ocean have it; but Lucia was the expert in such matters. No point in having an expert if you don’t listen to them.

“I’ll lock the door before we leave.” Said Simon. “This.....Object of evil shouldn’t be disturbed while we’re gone.”

By the time everyone who was needed ashore had gone ashore, a good part of the day had gone. The members of the crew who went with them took weapons, as the Ivory Coast had a bad reputation. Patsy felt a little envious of those remaining behind on the Mermaid. Galeoto had remained on his ship, mainly because of the bad reputation of that part of the globe.

"I hope we get no trouble." Said Galeoto. "If we do get trouble though, I get the feeling it will be massive, evil and nasty."

Simon and Giovanni had helped push the deck cannons to where Galeoto thought was the best spot for them. After that, it was the fairly slow process of getting everyone into the boats and dropping them off at the beach; with wet boots and trouser ends of course.

"There." Said Lucia, while pointing. "I can see the yurts of the village through the trees."

The villagers didn't seem keen on visitors who arrived on large sailing ships; especially ships with weapons and armour plating in key places. They did like gold though and they had a good source of drinking water to sell. They also had quite a few local vegetables to sell, though Patsy had never heard of any of them. Hassan had though and it wasn't his first visit to the Ivory Coast. If he said the food was edible, she accepted that it was edible. After all, he was eating the same provisions as everyone else. Once a price was agreed for the food and water, Galeoto was left to organise getting everything back to the ship.

"I think it's time for you to do your magic, Lucia." Said Simon. "Point us in the right direction for the City of Shadows."

"Does someone have the scrolls ? We'll need the scrolls." Said Lucia.

"I have them." Said Patsy, patting the leather bag she carried.

Lucia began chanting, in a language Patsy had never heard before. The witch from Malta began to dance around in a circle, getting faster as her chanting speeded up. The strange thing was that the local tribespeople joined in after a while, chanting in a different language to Lucia. They had their own dance too, as they joined her.

"They recognise one who has power." Said Mia.

Patsy was sure they were going to lose the day, as the dance went on and on. Surely no one would want to set off into the unknown close to dusk. The tribespeople stopped for food and drink, but Lucia didn't stop for several hours. Simon tried to give her a water bottle, but it was as if the witch was in some kind of trance.

"There's dedication and there's stupidity." Said Cosimo. "She'll make herself very sick if she doesn't drink."

It was close to dusk when Lucia stopped chanting, though the chant had begun to sound like a song. She stopped dancing too and the tribespeople stopped too. Everything seemed to be quiet. Lucia pointed her hand inland, indicating a direction almost straight east from where the Mermaid had dropped anchor.

"There.....Borren and his shadows are there; waiting." Said Lucia.

Some of the tribespeople wanted to go with them; it seemed that they now thought of Lucia as some kind of holy woman. At first Simon wasn't keen, but the tribe were well armed and it wasn't as if anyone was suggesting bringing their children with them.

"Fine.....If they're so set on coming, they can come." Said Simon. "A few extra fighters will probably be useful."

A few extra fighters became an extra fifty of the best warriors in the village. No children of course, though a few of the warriors were women. By the time everyone was ready to go it was dark. Not

dusk, not a little way from dusk; it was dark. Simon spent a few minutes trying to talk Lucia into starting their trip to the City of Shadows the following morning, but he obviously failed.

“Bring lamps and torches, we leave now.....Tonight.” Said Simon.

Patsy had always thought it was a little bit magical, the way everyone in the world looked up at the same moon. There it was, not full but nice and bright. Add on a few oil lamps and burning torches and their expedition wouldn't want for light. On the other hand, any enemies would see them approaching for miles.

“The local warriors will be useful.” Said Lucia. “They know the places best avoided, especially in the dark.”

There was a river to cross, but it was shallow, the water not running that fast. Not much fun to get drenched up to the waist, but the river posed no real threat. Simon and Giovanni became the eyes of the expedition, with their vampire eyes. They still needed the local warriors though, to give meaning to what their vampire eyes were seeing. Karkengara was with them too, keeping himself well hidden until the fighting began with Borren's shadows. Occasionally the bringer of fire was whispering in Patsy's ears, though she had no idea why he'd chosen her for the honour.

“The Borren won't sense my presence.” Whispered Karkengara. “He is a creature of fire; I can do little to him. His shadows though, I can crush them like children's toys.”

Patsy would nod, but Karkengara said a few things which worried her. He was a deity, a huge unstoppable God; come up from the underworld. Yet by his own admission, he could do no real harm to Borren, leader of the shadows. It seemed that killing Borren would fall to the non-dragon looking members of the expedition. Patsy just hoped they were up to the task.

“Weapons ready !” Yelled Lucia. “I can sense some shadows in amongst the trees.”

Only a few shadows in the shape of human fighters and they didn't fight well. Maybe Borren was using them to test foes with the audacity to march on his city ? The shadows fell far too quickly to the blades of those in the expedition and they fell too easily. At least fifty shadows had hit the ground and seemingly evaporated, without leaving a scratch on anyone. Giovanni actually commented on it.

“That.....Was worryingly easy.” Said Giovanni.

“Where is the City of Shadows ?” Asked Juliana. “All I see are stunted trees and dry dusty ground.”

“Simon is the only one here who can reveal the city.” Said Lucia. “It is his destiny, given to him by the Ancient Gods.”

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Simon Atherton allowed himself to be instructed by Lucia, which felt a lot like being ordered around. She was the expert after all and knew more about his quest than he'd told her. Lucia removed one of the scrolls from the leather bag Patsy had carefully carried all the way from the Mermaid. He was prepared to read words he didn't understand, it had happened a few times before. Read this aloud as the letters look, repeat the section underlined; Simon was used to being treated like an idiot when it came to books and scrolls. His main skill was weapons and the gifts given to him when Giovanni had turned him into a vampire, a creature that lived on human blood. Not that he'd swap his fangs for the ability to read a hundred dead languages.

“Oh, I wasn't expecting this.....I can actually read it.” Said Simon.

“This scroll was written for you to read, long before you were born.” Said Lucia. “It was actually written before there were any people to read it, or any languages.....It was written just for you to read on this day, Simon Atherton.”

“Wow, that kind of thing screws with you head.....Who wrote it ?” Asked Patsy.

“Their name is unimportant.” Said Lucia. “They no longer exist, but their words still hold immense power.”

Lucia told Simon to kneel on the dry dusty ground, so he knelt. He was told to read the third paragraph of the scroll and keep reading it until something happened.

“What will happen ?” Asked Simon.

“With luck, a miracle.....The City of Shadows, the home of the Borren will rise up out of the ground. It has to happen, or your quest has failed.” Said Lucia.

“Good luck.” Said Cosimo. “Read it loudly.....Being loud seems to work with most things.”

Simon looked at Lucia, hoping for a nod of agreement, or a shake of her head.

“Shout it, or whisper it.” Said Lucia. “It will make no difference. Read it now Simon and see if your quest carries on, or dies on the Ivory Coast.”

On his knees among friends, tribespeople he didn’t know and the occasional voice of Karkengara muttering into his mind. Being truthful, Simon felt a little silly and hoped that something happened, even if it was something unexpected. He read the third paragraph of the scroll, which was mainly about accepting the darkness and the ultimate futility of human existence. If it had been written as a pep talk for the future, written in the past ? It wasn’t inspiring Simon. The Last three lines were about the first forest and the first people. Reading those lines did give him a tingle.

“Again, Simon.....Read it again.” Karkengara muttered in his head.

Simon read that paragraph five times before anything happened. For a few seconds the sky became red, a bright glowing red. The moon vanished and the animals in the woodland around them seemed to be screeching in fear. After no more than ten seconds, everything went back to being a normal night on the Ivory Coast; or what Simon assumed was a normal night in that part of the world. The moon was red for a short while, which upset the tribespeople. Soon though, the moon became the shining enormous piece of rock they were all used to seeing in the night sky.

“Well.....That was definitely something happening.” Said Juliana.

Simon stood up; even a vampire’s knees began to ache from being knelt on for too long. There was something on the way, he could feel it.

“What do we do now ?” Asked Patsy.

“I bet we have to wait for weeks.” Said Giovanni. “I remember Leptis Magna; the Old Gods like to make you wait.”

“You won’t be kept waiting this time, Giovanni.” Said Lucia.

“Don’t ask me how I know.....Something is on its way.” Said Simon.

It wasn’t instant, the movement of the ground arrived with the dawn. The soil began to vibrate and one or two of the larger trees fell over. The tribespeople began chanting again, but Lucia simply stood and watched.

“I feel it now.....Something rising up from deep down below.” Said Mia.

A hole opened up in the ground and Cosimo fell into it. Not a huge hole and Giovanni easily pulled him out of it, but it was unnerving. The chanting tribespeople began to dance in a circle. When sixty feet of stone tower was thrust up out of the ground, Simon thought it was time to move back from the convulsions of the ground.

“Back.....We need to be on firmer ground.” Yelled Simon. “Follow me.”

He took them back the way they’d come, to an area of hard stony ground. The locals might not understand his words, but they understood what was going on. Still chanting and dancing, the Tribespeople kept close to Lucia. The City of Shadows came up out of the ground, as if the planet

was giving birth to stone buildings. Temples were fairly recognisable, but there were huge towers which seemed to defy gravity.

“Who built this city ?” Asked Mia.

“Not the first people, they lived in the forest.” Said Lucia. “Maybe the second people, or the third. Borren was known to the third people. He was worshipped as some kind of dark saviour.”

“Saviour from what ?” Asked Cosimo.

“None of that matters now.....Anyway, it’s all written in the scrolls.” Said Lucia.

The soil came up with the buildings, coating flat areas of building in inches of the dry brown earth. It wasn’t a huge city, but it was larger than Leptis Magna and more intact. Impressive was the word in Simon’s mind; the City of Shadows was impressive.

“I think it’s stopped.” Said Simon.

“Will it go back into the ground when we leave ?” Asked Giovanni.

“I don’t think so.” Said Lucia.

“Come on; let’s see what has risen up from below.” Said Simon.

Dark grey stone or dark black stone, the soil covered buildings didn’t seem to have aged since they’d been built. Judging by Lucia’s half answers and hints, that had to have been a very long time ago. Laura had known the first people of the first forest and they’d existed a staggering number of years ago. So long that even thinking about the number gave Simon a headache. The City of Shadows hadn’t stopped impressing them.

“I see it, but don’t believe it.” Said Patsy. “A fountain has started working in front of the temple with the tower.”

“If half the claims for Borren are true.....A working fountain is nothing.” Said Lucia.

“What is Borren ?” Asked Julianna.

“Borren, leader of the shadows.....Thing of evil.” Said Lucia. “That just about sums up everything you really need to know. Will he be at his best after centuries buried under the soil of West Africa ? I doubt it, but we still need to be very, very careful.”

“Who buried him in his own city ?” Asked Gabriel.

“If we win you can read about that in the scrolls.” Said Lucia. “If we don’t win.....”

“Just make sure we do win.” Said Simon.

Karkengara was whispering in his ear again, telling Simon that the great and terrible Borren was a little wary of vampires. It was wonderful news, but the bringer of fire wasn’t really sure why.

“It’s vampire venom I think.” Said Karkengara. “He has no resistance to it. Keep biting him and in theory at least.....You could destroy him. Not dead in the usual sense, but turned to stone.”

Turned to stone would do very nicely. All Simon had to do was stay alive long enough to accomplish the feat. As he led everyone towards what looked like a town square for the City of Shadows, there were a lot of shadows, several hundred at least. They looked a lot less shadowy than the ones they’d beaten so easily. Armed with blades and cudgels, the shadows looked to be a formidable force.

“I think.....They sent out their top team this time.” Said Giovanni.

“The one at the back, the big one.....That must be Borren.” Said Hassan.

“I think you’re right.” Said Simon.

Taller than the shadows, but no more physically impressive than them. Borren wasn’t carrying a sword, or any other kind of weapon. Simon thought that was likely to mean Borren was a weapon. He’d need to be watched, every blow avoided and thought about. As for clothing ? Borren was dressed from head to foot in some kind of loose fitting fabric. It was hard to be certain about the fabric, as he was still some way off.

“Come on.....Let’s get this done.” Said Simon.

Mia Cassar had picked up the Borren Medallion after Patsy had dropped it to the floor of the forward hold. Nearly everyone had left and Simon was muttering something to Patsy. Mia had been many things in the Brotherhood, including a very talented thief. Quickly picking up the medallion and slipping it into a pocket had been easy. Simon had locked the door and as far as anyone knew, the evil medallion was left on the Mermaid. There had been something about the medallion from the chest, something that hinted at immense power. There might be a price to pay one day, but for the moment; Mia looked at the rows of Borren’s shadows and was glad the medallion was in her pocket. She even touched it with her fingers and felt the power it contained. Lucia suddenly spun round to look at her and shook her head.

“A mistake Mia, but what is done.....Can’t be undone.” Said Lucia.

“What was a mistake ?” Asked Cosimo.

“Nothing really.....Something private to Mia.” Said Lucia.

Mia nodded her thanks at Lucia and tried not to dwell on what the medallion might do to her as a price for its aid in the coming battle. It would help her against its creator, she now understood that. If there came a time when the evil piece of metal wanted her soul ? She’d face that day when it arrived.

“Karkengara is visible.....He’ll deal with the shadows.” Said Juliana.

“Creatures of the fire can’t be killed by fire.” Said Simon. “He is large and very heavy though, he can probably stomp on a great many of them.”

Which was what Mia saw him do, over and over again. Once stomped on by the ancient deity, the fallen shadows didn’t rise again. Luckily the tribespeople weren’t running away, terrified of the bringer of fire. They probably sensed that he meant them no harm. Mia saw Karkengara swing his tail into a group of shadows, but then she was in amongst the shadows and using her blade.

“If I fall today.....May my sins not be judged too harshly.” Said Mia.

Simon was near her, hacking away with a long blade, but having no luck. It seemed the shadows had some kind of armour under what passed for their skin. Simon’s blade definitely wasn’t doing the creature much damage. Mia narrowly avoided being hit by a large heavy cudgel.

“Bastard !” She yelled, one of her favourite words in a fight, or so she’d been told.

Mia stabbed with her blade, straight at the throat of the shadow. Her short sword went in deep, far enough to kill most people, but the shadows weren’t people. She hadn’t expected her opponent to gurgle and choke on its own blood, but it did grab at her blade; and try to pull it out. Too late though, the shadow fell to the ground and looked to be out of the fight.

“The throat.....Go for their throat.” Yelled Mia.

Simon took up the call and then Cosimo, who simplified it with a repeated yell to go for the throat. Eyes might have had the same result, or even the groin; but the throat was an easier target. Mia had a few wounds on her arms, as she strode through the rows of shadows, sending them to wherever claimed them after death. She was confident in her ability with a blade, maybe even happy to be fighting amongst many good friends. She ceased to be happy when she saw Cosimo killed.

“No.” She screamed.

It could happen to anyone in battle; stepping back from one opponent, to be hit by another. Cosimo had been hit over the back of his head with a heavy club, a wooden cudgel with metal studs along its sides. His head broke apart like an egg and.....There was no coming back from that. Cosimo Pazzi was often taciturn, but his heart had always been in the right place.

"They killed Cosimo." Yelled Hassan.

Hassan and Gabriel were Cosimo's people, brought with him from his estate on the road from Florence to Livorno. Rosa had been with him too, but she'd met her end in Benghazi. For the last two of Cosimo's people it was a time for anger, bordering on uncontrollable rage. Mia walked between them, joining in their revenge. With Karkengara using his weight and claws on the shadows and them using blades; the shadows began to decrease in numbers. They were way in front of the others, even Simon and Giovanni seemed caught up somewhere behind them. Mia saw Borren and she knew what had to be done.

"I'm going after that one.....Borren." Said Mia. "He's the cause of all this."

"We're with you." Said Gabriel.

Ideally, Mia would have faced Borren on her own, but there were a lot of shadows between her and him. The three of them fought like furies, hacking and slashing until there was nothing between them and Borren, the evil thing from the darkness.

"He's mine." Said Mia.

"We came here together.....Cosimo was our friend." Said Hassan.

"I know, but Borren is mine." Said Mia.

"Let her try.....She's earned that." Said Gabriel.

Too late, too damned late; Simon was fighting Borren and seemed to be winning. How had he got ahead of her ? Maybe vampires could fly after all ? Simon was stabbing at Borren's face and throat and although he didn't seem to be achieving that much; Borren was backing away from him.

"Finish him Simon." Yelled Mia. "Make it painful.....Cosimo would have wanted that."

Borren might have been the victor of hundreds of battles, maybe even thousands. Like Lucia, it seemed that he sensed his medallion in her pocket. Mia pulled it out and taunted him with it, before shoving it inside her glove.

"You die today.....Thing of evil." Shouted Mia.

Simon obviously knew how to get the advantage of a strange situation and a confused opponent. It was almost as if showing him the medallion had genuinely shocked Borren. Simon dropped his blade and grabbed hold of Borren, sinking his fangs into his neck. Mia thought the thing of evil was unlikely to have warm red blood, but he screamed as Simon bit into his throat. The more Simon carried on biting, the weaker Borren seemed to become. Evil entities from the underworld weren't that easy to kill. Using a sudden burst of strength, Borren threw Simon from him. It seemed fate had given Mia her kill and she wasn't going to waste the opportunity. Simon wasn't beaten, but he seemed to be struggling to stand up.

"Look at me Borren." Shouted Mia. "You're mine now.....You can't escape me."

She used her fist, the one with the medallion inside the glove. Mia used her left hand to hold Borren and for a moment, she was sure she'd seen desperation in his deeply disturbingly black eyes. She hit his face with her fist and Borren yelled. He carried on yelling every time Mia punched him in the face, the neck, or even his throat. Was it her blows that killed him ? She had heard a few bones cracking, as she'd pummelled him. On the other hand, Simon's vampire venom was in his system in huge amounts. When Borren fell, she knew he would never rise again.

"Borren dies." Shrieked Lucia.

There was the sound of screaming coming up from the ground, as if the dark creatures of the underworld were already grieving their evil master. Mia expected the body of Borren to be swallowed by the ground or disintegrated into millions of pieces. There it lay though, crumpled and ruined.

“What did we gain from all this death ?” Asked Mia. “The world will be a lot less foul now, but how does this move on Simon’s quest ?”

“The City of Shadows holds the answer.” Said Simon. “I read the scrolls.....I know where to look.”

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Giovanni went with Simon, as did most of the crew of the Mermaid who’d come with them. Patsy didn’t need any encouragement to walk next to Simon, but Juliana remained with Hassan and Gabriel; Cosimo’s people.

“We’ll stop any wild creatures interfering with Cosimo Pazzi.” Said Hassan. “When you return from the City of Shadows we can decide what to do with his body.”

“Bury him here, where he fell.” Said Lucia. “The evil that filled this place has now gone.”

“I’ll stay and help you bury him.” Said Mia.

Lucia didn’t look well, but Giovanni had been made aware of her fate being ruled by a curse. Few knew about it, but according to Simon; it was supposed to take effect when Borren died and the evil that had surrounded him.

Giovanni walked on Simon’s right, with Patsy on his left. The others that had decided to come with them were spread out around them. Few seemed to have avoided picking up a wound or two in the battle. Who would heal them if Lucia fell victim to the curse ? That was something he didn’t want to dwell on.

“The tower, we need to enter the tower.” Said Lucia. “It’s from another world and doesn’t belong here.”

The tower of blue stone rose up above the other buildings and it looked too thin, too flimsy to withstand the weather and Ivory Coast storms. As for being from another world ? Giovanni was happy to accept that Lucia was their expert on such things. Everything in the City of Shadows looked out of place, unless that part of Africa had once been much more advanced. They found an open doorway into to the tower, two stones doors wedged open.

“I can’t guarantee this will be safe.” Said Lucia.

Which sounded as though they were about to follow Lucia up several floors of stairs. Or, perhaps carry her up many floors of stairs; she seemed to be deteriorating with every minute.

“Are you alright ?” Asked Simon. “I can carry you if that helps ?”

“Yes, we could easily carry you, Lucia.” Added Giovanni.

“No, I’ll last as long as I need to last.” Said Lucia.

The open doors had let sand storms into the tower. The room Lucia took them to was on the ground floor and looked like some kind of council chamber. Row upon row of large chairs, facing a chair that any king would be proud to call their throne. Was it Borren’s throne ? Giovanni suspected it was. Everything was covered in sand, which gave the room a feeling of immense age and neglect.

“Here.....Be my arms, dig for me.” Said Lucia. “Under the throne you’ll find it, unless Borren had the sense to destroy it.”

Giovanni dug, as did Simon, though they had no idea what they were digging for. Patsy shovelled sand with her hands and as luck would have it, she found the blade made of obsidian glass. Obsidian, volcanic glass as black as night and sharper than blue steel.

“Is this what we’re looking for ?” Asked Patsy.

“Yes, the Kings blade.” Said Lucia. “There should be a ring too; one is useless without the other.”

“Here, I felt the ring with my hand.....Black obsidian, like the blade.” Said Giovanni.

“The ring and blade of the King.....I read about them in the scrolls.” Said Simon.

Lucia looked finished, as if a good gust of wind would blow her away.

“Bury me here, Simon Atherton.” Said Lucia. “Cover my body in sand and leave it to the weather to deal with. Take the ring and blade of the King to an old friend of yours. Niccolò Machiavelli will know what needs to be done with them, he’d just about the only one who does.”

Vampires know when someone dies, Giovanni felt Lucia’s heart stop. She’d succeeded in what had been required of her and now the curse had taken her. There was a chill in the air and a brief strong wind, as if the soul of Lucia had begun its journey to wherever she was destined to go.

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