

Clara Copley

(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 23 - Jerome

“Niña removed the wreath from a hook on the door and placed it on the floor. No fire cantrip, Niña used a major spell, a no nonsense fire spell. The wreath went up in flames, a small inferno of paper, twigs and leaves. When all that was left of the wreath was a small pile of ashes, the door opened.”

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There were all sorts of reasons why Noah Williams had bought flowers, a basket of fruit and was about to enter the local hospital for the Hornsey house. Obviously he was there to visit Ronnie, who seemed to be recovering remarkably well from a truly dreadful wound. She should have probably died; even Mabina hadn't reckoned her chances were better than fifty-fifty. Noah strongly suspected someone had been using magic to heal Veronica Neophytou.

Clara had asked him to visit Ronnie with the obligatory flowers and fruit; even if she was on fluids only, the fruit basket looked pretty.

He was the manager of the Luna Blue now and Ronnie was regularly employed by the Luna Blue. On the books she was employed as a general admin person, but that tended to mean dealing with all sorts of skulduggery in Cyril H Carter's business empire.

The final reason Noah was visiting Ronnie, was because he genuinely liked her. A friend of Clara's and Laura's, who'd once worked for Simon. Ronnie had a long history with the people in the house and deserved to be looked after and pampered a little. Noah got lost in the maze of hospital corridors, but a nurse pointed him in the right direction. When he arrived at her room, Ronnie was watching the news on TV, with the sound turned right down.

“Noah, so good to see you.” Said Ronnie. “I'm so bored.....They get weird if I even go for a gentle walk along the corridor.”

“You have one hell of a wound, according to Mabina.” Said Noah. “They're just being cautious.”

“I suppose so.....They're talking about keeping me here for a week.” Said Ronnie. “A week, Noah; when I feel fine.”

“Niña is working out a visiting rota.” Said Noah. “You may get a visit for the reception team at Cyril's. Everyone is missing you.”

It was rolled up in an inside pocket of his jacket. Noah unfurled the copy of Private Eye he'd bought on the way, and dropped it in front of Ronnie. There was genuine glee on her face as she picked it up.

“Great.....Thanks, I love the cartoons.” Said Ronnie.

“Margot at the Luna Blue told me to get it for you.” Said Noah.

He dragged a chair over to the bed and gave Ronnie a gentle hug before sitting down. Ronnie looked so well, there had to be magic in her recovery somewhere, or one of Laura's friendly deities.

“You look so well.” He said. “Almost a miraculous recovery.”

“The doctors have said something similar, but still want to keep me in for a week.” Said Ronnie.

“Go on, I can keep a secret.....Who put the mojo on you ?” Asked Noah.

Ronnie was looking at him, as if trying to work out if he could be totally trusted. Noah could have been insulted, but chose to view it as making sure he was one of them, the family that revolved around the Hornsey house. At one time Noah had dated Ronnie, but that now felt like a lifetime away.

"I can't be a hundred percent certain." Said Ronnie. "I'm pretty sure it was Karkengara, the bringer of fire. I thought I'd dreamt him being here, but I felt so much better when I woke up. I think I owe him my life."

"Let's be honest about it." Said Noah. "If he hadn't found the pyramid, you'd have all been killed. I think we all owe Karkengara a lot. The next time Clara arranges a visit to his temple in the Underworld, I want to go."

"That sounds a great idea." Said Ronnie. "It's still quite inflamed.....Do you want to see my wound?" A strange question, but they were hardly strangers. They'd spent quite a few Sunday afternoons naked and having fun suited to their respective ages and genders. There was also a certain professional curiosity. Noah had received some fairly gnarly wounds over the years and dished out quite a few.

"Yeah.....Be interesting to see what the doctor made all the fuss about." Said Noah.

Someone had brought her in a pair of purple pyjamas, which were a bit too big for her. Ronnie pulled the pyjama jacket to one side, to reveal a large dressing. She was plucky to the point of being crazy. Ronnie started pulling at the sticky tape holding the dressing in place.

"Hey, should you be doing that?" Asked Noah.

"No problem, they'll be changing the dressing in an hour or so." Said Ronnie.

Ronnie gave a wince, as she pulled the dressing to one side, to let him see the awful wound. It looked livid and inflamed, but from his experience, it no longer looked infected. It was an amazing looking wound, because she'd survived the sword blow that had caused it. Noah brought out his phone, which took pretty good pictures.

"Alright if I take a couple of pictures?" He asked.

"Fine.....take as many as you like."

It wasn't his imagination; Ronnie was a happier wounded woman than when he'd arrived. It was the attention; everyone loves a bit of attention. Even if it was because of a gnarly sword wound in their side.

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Clara knew where the door was in the maze of locked rooms and chambers. She hadn't been there for a while, but still believed what Laura had been told by one of her friendly Ancient Deities. Niña was with her and this was to be their last visit to the sealed rooms. Karkengara had been to tell Tempest that his skills would soon be required to seal the rooms off forever; from everyone. There was just one problem and it had been a problem when Clara had first discovered the door.

"I never did manage to open the door." Said Clara. "I'm sure that working together, we'll get it open. We can't fail, Niña.....Once the rooms are sealed I'll never see what's beyond the door."

"What is behind this door?" Asked Niña. "I'm assuming you have an idea."

"My family.....A view of my childhood." Said Clara. "Beyond the door is a look at the family I can now only remember in dreams. Since giving birth to Justin, these things matter. I have a need to see the faces of my long dead family."

"I can understand that." Said Niña.

"I'm glad you do.....I thought such nostalgia was a thing of the past." Said Clara.

"We're vampires now, but we were once humans." Said Niña.

The girl was wise; some would say wise beyond her years. Clara hugged Niña, before looking at the plain, unpainted wooden door. There was a wreath on the door, with the names of her family attached to it on cards which had never yellowed, nor had the ink faded.

"Fate, Niña.....I believe I'm fated to open the door." Said Clara.

"What have you tried?" Asked Niña. "What didn't work?"

There was a small table near the door, with nothing on it. The options for objects to manipulate was limited, because there were no objects. Clara had been tempted to destroy the wreath, but found herself unable to do it.

"Mainly, I spent hours trying opening spells on the door lock." Said Clara.

"Let's see if my magic will get it open." Said Niña.

The young vampire began with a cantrip and quickly moved onto what looked like a hedge witch spell. There was no fire or smoke from the lock, but the entire door began to rattle. For a moment Clara thought Niña had done it and the door would open. No, the wreath fell off the door, but it was still locked. Niña put the wreath back on its hook.

"Crap.....I thought you'd done it when the door rattled." Said Clara.

"Have you ever tried breaking the rules." Asked Niña. "The two of us opened a far more solid looking door than this, by using enhanced strength."

"Laura and I tried that."

"No reason not to try again." Said Niña.

Clara was beginning to understand the virtue of bringing a fresh mind to the problem. There was no point in making a list of the things they'd tried and not bothering to try them again.

"Fine.....Like the other door, we'll stand side by side and push like crazy." Said Clara.

Clara had the necessary spells already lined up in her mind. It didn't take long to use them and give them both staggering preternatural strength. Not that they'd suddenly looked like Schwarzenegger, their muscle bulk would remain pretty much the same.

"On three, then push as hard as you can." Said Clara. "One.....Two.....Three."

Clara pushed at the door and it rattled on its hinges, it even bowed inwards. It didn't open though, or show any inclination to open. Clara suspected that both the door and the lock were enchanted; probably the door frame too. Clara moved away from the door, as if officially saying pushing at it wasn't going to work.

"For a second there, I thought it was going to open." Said Niña.

"I think we were closer than when I tried with Laura." Said Clara.

Clara sat on the floor, her legs tucked under her in the lotus position. She looked at the door, as if trying to will it to open. It had been like this before; quickly running out of sensible things to try, and a few stupid ones.

"Ok, don't get angry.....We need to think outside the box." Said Niña.

"Laura wanted to bring some C-4 in here." Said Clara. "So fire away, I've probably heard a worse idea."

They'd tried the C-4 and it hadn't even scratched the wooden door, but Niña didn't need to know that.

"I know your family died in a fire, I think Simon mentioned it." Said Niña.

"Yes, they did.....Everyone who'd ever mattered to me, died in a flour mill explosion."

"So maybe.....We need to burn the wreath and the cards." Said Niña.

"No, I couldn't do that.....It wouldn't feel right." Said Clara.

Clara was giving Niña the look which had made Korean drug dealers back away, but Niña just carried on talking.

“Maybe that’s it.....Doing it even if it doesn’t feel right.” Said Niña. “It’d be a kind of sacrifice....The wreath and the cards are just some paper and leaves. Sacrifice them Clara.”

The annoying thing was that Laura had suggested burning the wreath and Clara had given her the long version of the over my dead body speech. Listening to Niña it actually sounded sensible. A sacrifice to renew some old memories; it actually made sense.

“It sounds sensible, but I don’t think I could burn the wreath.” Said Clara.

Niña was holding on to her arm, clinging to her like a student who knows they’ve just had a better theory than their teacher.

“I know this will work.....Please, Clara.” Said Niña. “Let me burn the wreath.”

“Let me take a few pictures of it before you burn it.”

“No, Clara.....It must be a complete sacrifice.” Said Niña.

Clara wanted to bang the girl’s head off the wall, mainly because she was probably right.

“You do it.....Burn it.” Said Clara.

Niña removed the wreath from a hook on the door and placed it on the floor. No fire cantrip, Niña used a major spell, a no nonsense fire spell. The wreath went up in flames, a small inferno of paper, twigs and leaves. When all that was left of the wreath was a small pile of ashes, the door opened.

“Wow, it actually worked.” Said Niña.

“Come through the doorway with me, Niña.” Said Clara. “Come and share my memories.”

As she stepped through into her memories; Clara knew what to expect the moment she caught the odour of freshly milled flour.

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The hospital was a tall building, from her bed there weren’t even any rooftops to see. Couple that with the very efficient aircon and Sophia Lombardi could have been anywhere in the world. The morning after her first procedure and Sophia knew she was in Nairobi, Kenya. It had been a long journey to get there and the first surgical procedure had taken a while.

“It’s a good job someone was sensible and sent you to see me.” Doctor Awamir had told her.

The doctor was middle aged and original from the UAE. He now travelled the globe, operating on those who could afford his services. Sophia was happy that Nathalie and the Silver Dawn, were paying all her medical bills.

“Infection had set in with one of the deep wounds.” Doc Awamir had continued. “If you’d left it much longer you could have been disfigured for life.”

There’d be another two procedures fairly quickly and then the doc would return in about six weeks to carry on working on her face. It might take a while and there had been no promises; but the Doc had said he was hoping she’d end up with no permanent scars.

“Maybe just a slight scar in front of your right ear, Sophia.” The Doc had said. “Think of it as a wonderful ice breaker at parties.”

Sophia liked Doctor Awamir, he had a way of talking which inspired confidence. Plus if Nathalie was flying him across the globe to operate on her; Sophia trusted the rather attractive middle aged doctor. As for what to do between procedures ? She could either live in a five star hotel with Nathalie picking up the bill, or remain in the hospital. Sophia was currently playing that one by ear.

“Just so long as Gen sends me a few pictures of the gold.” Sophia muttered.

There had been one phone call from Akiva, telling her to get well soon; the standard and almost obligatory call. If it was possible, Sophia still wanted to get back there, to the compound on the outskirts of Addis Ababa.

She'd been told to buzz for a nurse if she wanted to leave her bed after the procedure, even to just visit the bathroom. Her bathroom, she'd been given a very nice private room. Sophia didn't fancy company during her visits to the bathroom.

"Sit on the edge of the bed and see if I feel dizzy." She muttered.

She gave it a couple of minutes and decided to drag the drip stand over to the window with her. She was connected to it by some many tubes; there really was no question of leaving it behind. It trundled behind her over the immaculately clean floor. She had to see the world out there, even if it was just office blocks and government buildings. Sophia rested her arms on the windowsill and looked at Nairobi when most of its citizens were on the way to work. It looked busy, lots of cars and people hurrying about.

"I could be anywhere.....Any major city, in any country." She muttered.

There were probably more palm trees than she'd have seen from a hospital window in Washington or New York, but otherwise. From up high all big cities looked the same. A nurse arrived, they probably monitored what she was doing in some way, or maybe she was still a little paranoid from her days with the CIA. She didn't recognise the nurse.

"No, no.....Please call for help before getting out of bed."

"Sorry, I just wanted to see the city." Said Sophia.

"You have a call.....You may sit in your chair if you wish ?" Asked the nurse.

"That would be nice."

By the time Sophia was sat in her chair, the phone on the table next to her chair was ringing. There was a fresh bowl of fruit on the table too. Getting hospital treatment on Silver Dawn's account definitely had its perks. Sophia picked up the phone.

"Hello." She said.

Talking made her face ache a little. Nothing awful, nothing that could be remotely called pain, but there was an ache. The nice doctor from the UAE had warned her there would be.

"Sophia, this is Nathalie Aurigny. Is the hospital looking after you ?"

"Yes, they are." Said Sophia. "I'm glad you arranged all this, thank you. Doctor Awamir found an infection and several other problems which were quite serious. He's taking care of all of them."

She heard Nathalie sigh and the slight squeak as she rested back in her chair. Some said Nathalie could be a ruthless boss, but the CIA had never looked after her even half as well.

"Good, Good.....I hear you've been asking about going back to the compound." Said Nathalie.

"The surgery is going well and I really hate missing everything happening in Ethiopia."

"You do have a bit of history with Max Romero.....A grudge I heard." Said Nathalie.

Sophia was tempted to lie, but that was bound to come back at her. Nathalie wasn't stupid and she had some of the best intelligence gatherers on the planet. Honesty was the thing, coupled with a lot of sincerity. Sophia was realising how much getting back to the compound meant to her.

"I'm a professional; I can work with someone I dislike." Said Sophia. "I was once partnered with a woman I actually hated, but it never affected my performance. You can't trust him by the way, Max I mean."

"Funny enough, a few people told me that about you." Said Nathalie.

Nathalie laughed and it was impossible not to laugh with her. Sophia knew she'd never see the inside of the compound again. She had been paid though, for the full length of the assignment; the

money was in her bank. Then there was living a five star lifestyle for a while, as her face was repaired. All in all, Sophia could live without seeing dross turned to gold.

"I can see it's a bit of an impasse." Said Sophia. "I'm assuming you won't want me back at the compound. Not a huge problem, it'll give me time to heal up."

"Everything at the compound will be recorded." Said Nathalie. "Come to Brittany in a few months and I'll show you the recording of that moment in the laboratory, the moment when Gen transmutes base metal into gold."

"It's a date.....I'll be there." Said Sophia.

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Gen Debré wasn't exactly a lab geek, but the instructions for creating gold didn't sound very lab geeky. No mention of using exact amounts of chemical, but it wasn't bucket chemistry either. The main point she'd learned was that alchemy had little to do with the sort of chemistry kids learned at school.

"For base metal, the Psochic bible recommends lead." Said Gen. "Does anyone have a problem with that ?"

She was in charge, Nathalie had told her that so many times. Max and Anne might have more experience with such things, but it was her project. If there were any disputes about the formula, hers was the final decision.

"Some use copper, but personally.....I too recommend lead." Said Maximillian Romero.

Anne Roberts simply nodded at her, as did Akiva Yatsko. About five minutes into their first planning session and no arguments. Of course, that wasn't going to last.

"I noticed Westcott called upon Ishtar to power the transmutation." Said Max. "Ishtar can be a little unpredictable."

"I tend to agree with that..... Azazel is much easier to work with." Said Anne.

"Yes, Azazel is the perfect choice." Said Max.

Gen had never been an expert on the occult, or alchemy, but her great grandfather had. It was her first opportunity to stamp her authority on the project. She just hoped it worked.

"Ishtar and Azazel can both be a little.....Mild and tame." Said Gen. "When Westcott wanted a particularly fruitful day, he called upon the Gods from another plane of existence."

"I heard that too.....Double the gold, compared to Ishtar." Said Anne.

"Double the risk too.....Are you willing to call upon such forces ?" Asked Max.

"Yes Max, I am." Said Gen.

She had their attention and a respectful silence. All Gen had to do now was find out how to call upon such deities. According to Westcott, details could be found in the private papers of the long dead James Maynard.....Easy-Peasy.

"How much gold are we creating on the first run ?" Asked Akiva.

Typical Akiva, he'd be wanting exact amounts of yield soon, which was just about impossible. Still, she was going to explain the idea of them not doing that kind of chemistry; nice and early.

"We'll start with one pound of lead." Said Gen. "There are so many factors involved in the yield of Gold. I'll be happy if we end up with eight ounces of pure gold."

"Yes, that would be magnificent for the first try." Said Max.

Anne had been fiddling with a pocket calculator.

"I tend to agree.....Somewhere between eight and nine ounces." Said Anne.

"What is that worth at the current market rate ?" Asked Aviva.

He'd know, he'd probably been thinking over the numbers all night. Nathalie had probably offered them all a cut when the gold was sold. If all went well, they'd all leave the compound as wealthy people, very wealthy.

"Eight pure ounces." Said Max. "Markets are volatile at the moment, but a pound is likely to bring in a hundred thousand UK pounds, or fifty thousand for eight ounces."

"Not bad for a morning's work." Said Akiva.

"It'll be better once we begin tweaking things to optimise the yield." Said Gen. "Not that I intend to be producing gold today. Today is all about planning, we'll get down to work in the morning."

"We'll all soon be very rich." Said Anne.

Not that Gen would refuse her cut, but she hadn't been expecting Nathalie to offer her part of the sale proceeds. Gen had the same desire as Sophia, she just wanted to be part of it; she wanted to see lead transmuted to pure gold. Gen was beginning to miss the ex-CIA operative.

"Some believe grinding the philosophers stone to a powder, will increase the yield." Said Max.

"That'll turn it into a consumable." Said Anne. "Once we get a certain amount of gold that'll be it, we'll have used up the powder."

"Yes, but we'll have more gold than Fort Knox by then." Said Max. "Besides, leaving it in the pestle shape won't stop deterioration as it's used."

Gen had knowledge her great grandfather had left to the world, in his own occult grimoire. She may not have actually carried out a transmutation, but she knew how to do it in the most efficient way.

"No powdering, no using it up in any way." Said Gen. "There is a way of using it as a catalyst in the reactions. All the gold we could desire, with none of the philosophers stone used up."

"I'd heard about that, can you do it?" Asked Anne.

"Yes, I can." Said Gen.

She hoped she could, if it didn't work she was going to look pretty stupid. Controlling the Gods from another plane would be hard too; they had a desire to invade other worlds. There was a lot to do, but judging by the looks the others were giving her, they'd be loyal, at least for a while.

"Can we do a practise run today?" Asked Akiva.

"No, today we plan." Said Gen. "It might help if you got used to wearing gas masks around the compound. Many alchemists died from what were reported as strange maladies, or diseases sent as punishments from the Gods. They believed transmutation to be an affront to the Gods. In truth, in most cases they died from the pollutants released during the reactions. So get used to wearing those masks."

"In most cases.....That begs a question." Said Max.

"We'll just have to be very, very careful." Said Gen.

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Getting to the Esoteric Wisdom Group headquarters could have been a problem, if Laura didn't have the help of her Gudara. A six or seven hour flight to Nassau in the Bahamas and then a small island hopper. Not just time consuming; it was an expensive trip too. They could have all done the first part of the trip first class, for the price of chartering the small island hopper plane. Of course the pilot would have told Jerome's people they were on the way; they might have been attacked the instant their feet touched ground. All of that huge expense and risk of death, was avoided by getting her Gudara to deliver them quite close to Jerome's house. At night of course.

"You know the plan." She said to her Gudara. "Enter the house and kill anyone who tries to kill you. Be thorough, we've no intention of ever coming back here again."

He sort of grunted at her, a pleased kind of grunt; before vanishing.

“Trust me, that is a Gudara who likes to be let off his leash occasionally.” Said Tim.

“You never mentioned not harming children.” Said Adelaide.

“No need, he probably has the best moral compass out of all of us.” Said Laura.

Long Cay was the name of the island, just eight square miles of tropical paradise. Just enough room for about thirty locals and the unofficial headquarters of the Esoteric Wisdom Group. It was Jerome’s island hideaway really; he even kept his servants and protection team off the island’s occasional census. He brought the occasional playmate to the island as a distraction, it was said he preferred slender blonde girls. Maybe he was over enthusiastic in his enjoyment of them ? Many were never seen again. His house was a brick built building from the colonial days. According to Adelaide’s contacts, Jerome had spent a fortune make the building comfortable.

“This way.....I can sense several human heartbeats.” Said Tim.

“Your enemy, your choice, Adelaide.” Said Laura. “Are we going to interrogate Jerome, or simply kill him ?”

“Kill him.....Fast or slow, I don’t care.” Said Adelaide. “Kill him and as many of his people as we can find.”

“Remind me to never upset you.” Said Tim.

The house had it’s own generator, which made sense. Jerome was hardly likely to be happy with oil lamps and no connection to the World Wide Web. Laura saw the glow of the lights, before she saw the wonderful looking colonial house. Then things became noisy, as she assumed her Gudara was carrying out her orders.

“Lots of automatic weapons.” Said Adelaide. “I hope your Gudara hasn’t gone to his death.”

“He’ll be fine, always is.” Said Laura. “By the time they fire at where he was, he’s no longer there. Even Old Thomas didn’t know how to stop my Gudara wiping out his guards.”

“This house is pretty nice.” Said Tim. “In a Bond villain kind of way.”

Even in just a few outside lights, it did look impressive. Tim was right, it looked what it was, the hideaway home of a high level crook. There was a lot of running about in the house; Laura was sensing around twenty human heartbeats. An explosion took out part of a ground floor wall, showering an area of garden in debris.

“Crap.....Does your Gudara have grenades ?” Asked Adelaide.

“No, unless he took explosives from a dead enemy.” Said Laura.

“The hole in the wall looks like a good way inside.” Said Tim.

The edges of the hole in the brick wall were scorched, which was unexpected. Laura noticed the wire and realised that someone had been setting traps. As her Gudara wasn’t lying dead in front of her, she assumed he’d moved before the trap had exploded.

“Be extra careful.....Someone in the house is arming traps.” Said Laura.

“Jerome must have been expecting us.” Said Adelaide.

“Maybe not.....He’s probably just a little paranoid.” Said Tim.

Laura kept forgetting that Adelaide liked to carry a gun when she could. Unlike British Airways, her Gudara had no problem with people carrying guns while travelling. As a man walked out of a room to their right, Adelaide shot him; twice in the chest.

“Wow, you’re pretty good with that thing.” Said Tim.

“You just need to do that again about a dozen times.” Said Laura.

There was another explosion, right above them this time. Plaster from the ceiling showered down, covering them in the dry white powder. Laura noticed there were now three less living humans on the floor above them.

“My Gudara will instinctively move towards Jerome.” Said Laura. “We should take the stairs to the floor above us.”

Laura sensed a fast beating heart coming down the stairs. As the woman holding an Uzi appeared, she grabbed her. Laura ripped out the woman’s throat and dropped her still twitching body.

“This way.” Said Laura.

“I’m now envying vampire fighting skills, again.” Said Adelaide.

The building had two main floors and small attic area underneath the roof. As there was no one in the attic, Jerome had to be where they and her Gudara were heading. An Uzi barked and a few moments later, there was a scream. Another heartbeat stopped.

“I hope your Gudara leaves a few for us.” Said Tim.

“Personally, I’d be happy to let him wipe them all out.” Said Laura. “A spot of looting of course, then we could go home.”

“Where’s your sense of adventure ?” Asked Adelaide.

“Hey, that’s what I usually say.” Said Laura.

At the top of the stairs a man came at Laura with a long curved blade. Maybe they weren’t expecting vampires with their speed and strength. Laura snapped the man’s neck and picked up his blade.

“This is a Yemeni Janbiya, Clara’s favourite blade.” Said Laura. “I always wondered how good they were. After I’ve finished with it, I’ll give it to her as a present.”

There was another burst of Uzi fire and a few moments later, another heart to their right; stopped beating.

“This way.” Said Laura.

Despite what she’d said, Laura hoped her Gudara left Jerome for Adelaide to kill. Otherwise it had been a hot and sweaty night a long way from home, to simply look at a dead body.

“How many of them left ?” Asked Adelaide.

“Five in the house.” Said Tim. “There may be others in the grounds.”

It had to happen occasionally, a head and gun holding hand appeared around the side of a doorway. The enemy woman fired fast and Laura was slow getting out of the way; it happened. Laura lost a chunk of flesh from her upper arm and it hurt like hell.

“Bastard !” She yelled.

Laura used the Janbiya on the woman; the moment seemed to require it. Her first thought was that she could understand why Clara loved that type of blade, it was light, razor sharp and easy to wield with one hand; it was perfect. Her second thought was to drink some of the blood of her enemy before she died.

“Wow, that is a nasty looking wound.” Said Adelaide.

“The flesh will grow back and heal by morning.” Said Laura. “Now though.....It hurts like fuck.”

There was more screaming and only one human heartbeat was left. That was in the room they were heading for, right at the end of the corridor. Laura would have bet her next bonus from Nathalie, that they’d find Jerome beyond the door. Her Gudara was stood looming over a man who was crouching against the wall. There was blood all over her Gudara; he was drenched in it; though Laura suspected none of it was his. He was growling at Jerome, in a way that could never be mistaken for friendly.

“Call that thing off me.....He’s already killed Cassidy and Brent.”

The man spoke with a mild, but unmistakably Australian accent. Laura grinned at Adelaide, who grinned back. They’d obviously found the right guy; Jerome leader of the Esoteric Wisdom Group.

“He’s all yours Adelaide.” Said Laura. “Do with him as you please.”

“Yeah, make it painful.” Added Tim.

“Adelaide Ducombe, I know you.” Said Jerome. “Kill me and I shall curse you from beyond the grave. Not just you, your entire family will know pain and suffering for generations. Free me and I will reward you; I’m a very wealthy man.”

“If I had a dollar for every time I’ve been threatened with the good old, from beyond the grave curse.” Said Laura.

“Indeed.....Most tiresome.” Said Adelaide.

Adelaide shot Jerome twice in the head and once in the chest. It was unexpected, but definitely got the job done. Laura’s Gudara gave one of his satisfied gurgles. He’d only known Jerome for a short period of time and already seemed to dislike him. Adelaide’s phone rang, which should have been impossible. Jerome probably used a satellite service and Laura had seen Adelaide turn her phone off, before coming to Long Cay.

“Is the Euro Millions lottery a real thing ?” Asked Adelaide, as she looked at her phone.

“Yes, it’s really huge.” Said Laura.

“I never entered it, but I appear to have won a hundred million Euros.” Said Adelaide.

“Choronzon obviously keeps his promises.” Said Tim.

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