

Quid Pro Quo

(Season three of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 26 – The Hermit

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Vampires lived relatively long lives, usually dying at the hands of a stronger, faster, more skilful vampire. They weren't celebrities though; their continued existence relied on them being loners who kept to the shadows. The whole idea of abjuring the light and taking to the shadows had been hijacked by various terrorist groups, yet the original idea had been theirs, the vampires, the ancient predators who hunted alone and in secret. Getting from Jordan to Prague, capital city of the Czech Republic in a hurry, gave her as many problems as it would the average person on the street. No calling someone famous to borrow their private jet. Time was of the essence though; Yosef Khatib had to be dealt with before the entire Middle East knew she meant to kill him. Not travelling by air had one huge advantage of course; she could arrive in Prague armed to the teeth.

“Have you got everything you need Tim ?” She asked. “I'm not totally sure my Gudara can do this, but if he can, we'll need to go right away.”

“I have a gun and a knife, though I'm not expert with either.” He replied. “In my pocket is the golden scarab that is supposed to be worth a fortune.”

He swirled his coat a little to show her the holster strapped across his chest and under his right arm. No Akiva with them, she thought it was time to take Tim into a potential fight without anyone to watch his back. Apart from her of course, she'd do her best to keep him alive.

“I just hope the hermit likes gold.....Most people do.” She said. “He might be an old timer of course and demand the still beating heart of a virgin.”

“Tough choice, but personally.....I'd take the gold.” Said Tim.

“Alright.....Sit cross legged on the rug beside my bed, and don't say much until he gets to know you.”

“Is your Gudara dangerous ?” He asked.

“Of course he is, or he wouldn't be any use to me.”

Laura settled herself on the rug beside her bed, the pink one she hated more with each passing day. She was looking forward to chucking it out when the new rug arrived from Jordan.

“Gudara.....Come to me.....I have need of your help.” She yelled.

It was definitely more about the thoughts in her mind and the intensity of her summons than the words themselves, she was now sure of it. Shouting helped emphasise the importance of her summons. Her Gudara was there almost instantly, placing his huge hand on hers. He nodded at her and gave a low growl, which was now part of his greeting.

“Thank you for coming, I have somewhere I need to go.” She said. “Getting me there might be awkward, but I know you like a challenge.”

He gave his friendly growl, though she was aware he might not understand the notion of a challenge. As long as she described what she wanted carefully he'd do his best, she knew that. She took the picture off the bed and put it in front of him.

“Do you know this bridge in Prague ?” She asked

There were lots of landmarks he might know in Prague, though the Charles Bridge was the one she hoped he might be able to take them to. Prague had become a home to many vampires during the period when the Charles Bridge was the only way of crossing the river. For several hundred years it was the only way to get from Prague Castle to the Old Town. As her Gudara had served many of her kind, it was almost certain he’d know the bridge well. The picture on the floor looked almost the same as drawings from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

“It’s inconceivable he won’t recognise the bridge. It would be like us not recognising a picture of the Tower of London, or Buckingham Palace.”

She’d told Tim while he was digging through Google for sites and buildings in Prague that hadn’t changed much in the last few hundred years. Charles Bridge was her favourite, as it wasn’t a long way from where the hermit did business. Her Gudara looked at the picture for a few minutes before nodding his head. Good sign or a bad one ? She wasn’t really sure.

“I don’t like asking you twice, but Tim will be coming with us.” She said. “Can you take us both safely to the bridge in this picture ? It’s the Charles Bridge in Prague.”

Her Gudara nodded, but there was something about his manner. Laura had talked to him enough to know he was uneasy about something.

“Oh, it’s the years in between....I’m a fool.” She muttered.

On the bed was a print of a drawing Tim had found somewhere on a Prague tourism site. It showed the bridge had it been just a few years after being opened in about the year fourteen hundred. She put the drawing right in front of her Gudara.

“Is this how you remember the bridge ?” She asked.

He nodded several times, before grabbing her firmly the by the shoulder, then Tim. He gave them both his loudest friendly growl.

“Even I can tell the difference and I don’t know him well.” Said Tim. “Before he wasn’t sure, now he is.”

“You’re right Tim....Come on, up in your feet, we should be standing for this.”

“So we’re really going, right this moment ?”

“Yes we are....Grab my Gudara with one hand and me with the other.”

When everyone seemed to have a good hold on everyone else, she looked into the eyes of her Gudara.

“No frightening the locals my friend.” She said. “Take us to the Charles Bridge and leave us there, without anyone seeing you.”

He nodded and there was the usual swirling in the air, as if reality itself was in a gigantic mixing bowl. She had no idea how her Gudara did it, but when the swirling stopped, she and Tim were alone. It was still early morning in Prague, as it had been in France. There was no time difference between the Silver Dawn Headquarter in Brittany and Prague. They were close to one of the famous statues that ran along the side of the bridge. Statues of thirty saints according to the tourist sites, though vampires tended not to be into the saints and she doubted if she could recognise any of them.

“Well..... That wasn’t too bad.” Said Tim. “Though we seem to have startled someone.”

The bridge wasn’t empty, though only one old lady seemed to have noticed them. She was looking at them, open mouthed, as if ready to scream.

“She must have been looking right at this spot when we arrived.” Said Laura. “Come on, I know where to go from here....Quickly...Before she starts screaming.”

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“Now we’re actually here, there’s something I’ve been meaning to ask.” Said Clara.

Liz inwardly cringed a little, though not as much as she would have done just a few minutes before. A tingling had begun in her hands when they’d all seen the twenty first gate in the distance and the memories and knowledge of the Unnamed One had arrived with the tingle.

“Alright Clara, ask away ?”

“I understand we’re here so you can become the new guardian of the last gate to the underworld. I also just about get the whole balance thing. I know only you can stop a dreadful disaster that could end the world.....But what is that disaster.....Exactly ?”

“Vampires....All daft as a post.” Said Mabina.

“Hey, and besides....You’re a vampire.” Said Clara.

“I was also a Queen, ruler of what is now Bulgaria and Romania. That makes all the difference.”

“Please stop squabbling.” Said Liz.

There it was the twenty first and final gate to the underworld. She could walk up to it and step through....If she wanted to. Liz could sense Jack was waiting there to help her in a way that was totally impossible. If he managed to do the impossible, there was very little chance of him surviving the forces he’d need to unleash.

“We’re having a discussion, not a squabble.” Snapped Mabina.

“Beyond that gateway is every living thing that has been sent to the underworld.” Said Liz. “It’s worth thinking about that for a moment. Not just people, but the demons, the Jinns, the creatures that were here before mankind, creatures with brutal strength and powers.....You couldn’t imagine their powers in your worst nightmares. Then of course there are the millions of dead humans cursed to live in the darkness for eternity. Think of that gateway being thrown open so they can all come flooding through.....”

“Is that where we go ?” Asked Clara. “Vampires I mean....Is that where I’ll be going ?”

“Some call us the Children of Satan.” Said Mabina. “Where do you think we’re going ?”

“Most vampires will end up in Duat, the underworld.” Said Liz. “Though a few won’t. No use trying to change your nature and becoming a vegan Clara, you are what you are. If there’s a secret to a vampire avoiding an eternity of darkness, I don’t know it.”

“Helping maintain the balance can’t hurt.” Said Mabina.

“Maybe, I honestly don’t know.” Said Liz. “My job is just to make sure no one escapes once they’re in there. The Unnamed One is the perfect guard, the worst monster imaginable tasked with keeping all the other monsters safely and securely imprisoned.”

Liz started walking towards the gate, the others following her. It had become a routine, only the whimpering of the hounds indicated this gateway was going to be different. What would happen to their Hounds of Anubis once she’d done what had to be done ? She could hardly take them home with her.

“I see someone near the gate.” Said Mabina.

“That’s Jack and Wiremi.” Said Liz.

Wiremi couldn’t take part in what was about to happen the balance didn’t permit it. The seer had become a slave to his own self-imposed routines, that had been part of the problem. If only he’d done something a long time before. Liz ignored Wiremi and hugged Jack.

“Any closer to the gate and I’ll begin to change Jack.” She said. “Are you willing to help me ? I will only put you through this if you understand.....You probably won’t survive.”

She hugged the boy who wasn't really a boy, as though he was her own son. As for Wiremi ? It wasn't really his fault and he didn't deserve her hate, though that didn't stop her from glaring at him.

"I know not returning will destroy my mum." Said Jack. "I also know what will happen if you fail to become what you must become. I am full of uncertainty about so many things and my mind rings with inner turmoil. I am certain of just one thing Liz, it's my destiny to help you."

She hugged him again and kissed his cheek.

"You're really sure ?"

"Yes, I am."

Liz looked back at the two vampires who had helped her get there. It was fair to say she'd have never made it to the last gate without them. Once she'd have seen them as friends who made her a little nervous. Now she just saw two friends holding truly dreadful looking weapons.

"Don't approach any closer to the gate, and keep hold of the hounds." She told them. "It's up to me now and Jack of course. With luck you won't need those weapons of yours today."

She should have hugged them, it just didn't feel appropriate. Despite really trying hard at self-control, she couldn't walk past Wiremi without getting angry.

"Bastard.....If you'd done something sooner Seer....Bastard."

Wiremi dropped his head and simply looked at the ground.

"It's not really his fault." Muttered Jack.

"I know....I just need to blame someone."

Her eyes were beginning to change, the glow from the gate was changing. Like a huge stained glass window, each panel glowed a slightly different colour. It glowed with a kind of arcane energy, holy fire some called it. On its own the gate could stop most from approaching too close, but not all.

"Don't be scared Jack."

He was changing too, the boy who had never really been just a boy, was becoming like her. Not completely, a tiny bit of human would remain. If he survived that tiny scrap of humanity would be able to pull him back. He tightly held her hand of tentacles in his hand of tentacles.

"It feels so good....The power." He said.

"You'll get a chance to use every bit of that power Jack.....Enjoy the moment when it comes."

Liz was almost completely changed into the Unnamed One, when she ran an arm full of tentacles over the glowing gate. Passing through the gate would change her completely and lock her into being the keeper of the last gate until.....Until the next keeper arrived. That might be in a few thousand years, or the following spring, there was no way of being certain. On the whole though, Liz expected it to be a hell of a long time in the future. She looked at the mass of dark energy and writhing tentacles that had once been Jack.

"Ready ?" She asked.

Liz heard a sound in her head, the word Sident. A word so old.....A word from the oldest of the most ancient of dead languages. Not a human language, no man born of woman had ever spoken it. A word that could mean begin, or as in this case, so be it. Liz merged her tentacles with Jack's and entered the final gate to the underworld.

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There was actually a Tesco store on the corner as they turned right out of Národní Street in Prague's Old Town. No reason why there shouldn't be a Tesco's, it was that thing about seeing everyday things in faraway places. The sense of finding the ordinary on the path less travelled hit her again as they

walked past a restaurant claiming to do the 'Best Burrito in the City'. The wonderful smells coming out of the place seemed to validate their claim.

"Great.....Now I'm feeling hungry." Said Tim.

"If they're still open when we leave the hermit's place I'll treat you."

In theory the address they wanted wasn't that far away. In an alley behind a pet store, no more than a ten minute walk from those wonderful burritos. They didn't so much get lost, as turned around a little and it took them another half hour until they were pressing the doorbell.

"I hope he's not too weird." Said Tim.

"Weird can be fun.....But religious fanatics....Be ready for anything."

Most shop signs they'd seen had either been in English, or repeated in English. The sign above the back alley store wasn't in a language Laura could read. There was a smell though, it reminded her of hardware stores. Through a grubby window she could see about half a dozen pieces of wrought iron furniture, in various stages of construction.

"I'm sure we've got the right place." She said, while ringing the bell again.

Walter and Emily had told her the hermit spoke English. She put that to the test as a man opened the door.

"Hello, I believe you might be able to help me." She said. "I need something created out of metal, something special and unique."

"We were told to come and see you about it." Added Tim.

The man looked anywhere between thirty and forty. He was wearing an apron over his shirt and jeans, though he obviously didn't wear it all the time. His clothes were covered in small burn marks and rips in the fabric. His dark eyes observed them for a moment, though it wasn't obvious what he was looking for.

"Come in.....Please come in." He said.

His hair had looked red in the sunlight as he'd opened the door, though it looked a darker brown under the shop lights.

"Through here please."

Laura followed him through a doorway, with Tim close behind. It was like a magic trick, the man who was probably the hermit, had gone. She spun around, but there was no sign of him. Just a room with a grubby floor and lots of pieces of wrought iron stored in large bins.

"Where did he go?" She asked. "He was right in front of me."

He'd ducked down behind one of the bins, something so bizarre it hadn't occurred to her. The hermit, or at least she assumed he was the hermit, ran at her. He began to shriek something in Latin, while hitting her with a thin piece of wood, before trying to rub it over her face. Tim had his gun half out of its holster.

"No Tim, don't kill him.....Just get the idiot off me."

The hermit was strong for a thin wiry guy; she needed Tim's help to hold him against the wall without hurting him. He was still shrieking at her in Latin, though Laura didn't understand most of it. A few words sounded to be part of exorcism rituals she'd seen in one of Daniel's arcane books. She hadn't realised there were still people who took that stuff seriously.

"Be quiet, I'm not here to hurt you." She yelled.

Never tell a crazy shouty person to be quiet, she already knew from experience it tended to make them shout even louder. The hermit also had a knack of twisting his arms out of their grip. In the end Laura decided he needed to be hurt, just a little bit. She punched him in the stomach and almost instantly, the loud flow of Latin stopped.

"Wow, my ears are ringing." Said Tim. "Can I hit him next time ?"

"If he starts up again, we'll both hit him."

Laura took the piece of grubby looking wood from the now quiet hermit. As she touched it a familiar feeling went through her hand, she knew what it has once been part of.

"I understand now hermit, this wood came from a cross, a very old cross."

She rubbed the wood over her face and even licked the end of it, before briefly putting it in her mouth. Laura tried not to think about where the cross fragment might have been, but she'd definitely impressed the hermit. He'd gone from struggling and shouting to looking frozen to the spot and terrified.

"I think I've developed a tolerance to such things." She said. "I once poured some of my blood over a really ancient cross. Then I poured a pint or so of my urine over it....All in the name of research of course. Personally I have nothing against any religion."

"If you'd done such a thing, you'd be dead." Said the hermit.

"Oh yes, there was pain and I had really bad brain fog for a while, but as you can see, I'm fine now. Can we get this out of the way....Are you the hermit ?"

"Some people call me that, who sent you to see me ?"

"I can't see any problem with telling you, they are already dead." She said. "The Couzinier told me to come and see you. They even gave me your address."

"Walter and Emily having anything to do with an unclean one....I find that hard to believe."

"No need for insults hermit.... Walter and Emily aren't exactly squeaky clean themselves.....But enough small talk. Show our new friend the scarab Tim."

Laura had been tempted to bring one or two of the pieces she'd recently stolen from The British Museum, though she still preferred to think of them as being acquired rather than stolen. Someone like the hermit would probably know their provenance and value by heart. She'd looked him up on the Silver Dawn database though and felt the history of the scarab would make him want to acquire it. Tim held the scarab in his left hand, turning it about so the hermit could get a good look.

"This came out of a crate full of artefacts, all once owned by Walter and Emily." She said. "Some of the items found in the crates my friends were given contained items that had....Shall we say, a life of their own. The scarab was placed in front of the flat screen so that we could keep an eye on it. As far as I'm aware it is just a very beautiful piece of Egyptian art, but as we're talking about the Couziniers, one can never be sure. Would you be interested in a trade for something I believe you currently have in your possession ?"

"I would, very much so.....May I hold it ?"

"Not until we see the item I want to trade it for. I want to swap that scarab for the Chains of Patmos. No negotiation, just a straight one for one swap, or there's no deal." She said.

"You want the chains God used to bind Satan ? They were created by God for one purpose, to bind Satan as he was expelled from heaven."

Laura began to understand the difficulty of dealing with a religious nutcase who seemed to believe every piece of nonsense they heard. She knew where and when the chains had been created and who they'd been intended to bind. The truth was strange enough, though it had nothing to do with the God the hermit believed in, or Satan. The chains had been made as part of a much earlier attempt to capture Yosef Khatib. She had learned never to contradict crazy people, especially when she needed something from them.

"I have need of the chains for a client, a scholar who wants them to add to his collection." She said.

"As you say, they're of no use to anyone apart from your God. Will you trade the scarab for them ?"

"Who is your client?"

"I can satisfy your curiosity, or leave you alive when I go.... Your choice."

"Fine....Fine.....But I will want to handle the scarab before I agree to the deal."

The hermit sort of shuffled out of the room, as though he was being forced into doing something he knew was wrong. Tim looked at her and mouthed 'Wow' at her while rolling his eyes. It was all she could do to hold back from laughing. It was rare to meet anyone with beliefs as extreme as the hermit's. The circle she moved in usually knew things that would astound the ordinary man on the street. They didn't need to believe in anything weird, they knew what did and didn't exist. How would the hermit greet the news that the Ancient Egyptian Gods were real, still around, and pulling a few strings to work the cosmos?

"Here they are.....Have a care, it is dangerous to touch anything made by God."

The hermit dropped an old holdall on the floor. Grubby and it still had the name of the credit card company on the side, the one that had given them out as free gifts a good twenty years before.

"Can I....?" Asked Tim.

"Go on." She replied.

The zipper still worked, just, Tim had to fiddle with it. It didn't seem a respectful way to store a divine relic. Inside the bag was a threadbare bath towel that clanked as Tim dropped it on the floor. He pulled the towel to one side, revealing a set of manacles made of out a silver coloured metal.

"Well.....I expected them to at least be in a proper case." She said.

"The grubby bag was to deter unappreciated curiosity, nothing more." Said the hermit.

She watched as Tim hesitantly touched the chain, just a quick touch with his index finger. No divine punishment, so he ended up picking the entire thing up and putting it on a table.

"Seems harmless enough." He said.

"You're not the real test, I am." She said.

Laura had a pretty good idea it was going to be painful and unpleasant. The biblical relic game was infamous for fakes though, she had to be certain. She reached out with just the small finger of her left hand, the finger she could do without, at a pinch. The pain was instant, quickly followed by....It felt as though someone had taken a hammer to her forehead. For a few seconds she was in hell, the pain genuinely too much to bear. It went away quite quickly though, leaving her sweating and breathing hard.

"Are you alright?" Asked Tim.

"Stupid, I will never do that again...Remind me never to do that again. We now know though, the chain is the genuine article."

"You should be dead." Said the hermit. "If you're happy with the chain, let me handle the scarab."

She nodded at Tim, who handed him the beautiful piece of Egyptian artwork.

"Be warned, you know I'm tough." She said. "If there's something nasty inside it you intend to use as a weapon, it had better kill me. Otherwise I'll tear your throat out."

"Is she can't I will." Added Tim.

"It might not be in it anyway." Said the hermit. "The Couziniers were better than P T Barnum at promoting themselves, especially Walter. A born showman, or so those who knew him say. Sadly they went missing long before I was born. If what I'm looking for is in there, it's totally harmless."

"No discounts if it isn't in there." Said Laura.

"Of course not, the trade is a good one.....I was just hoping."

Laura had played with the scarab, they all had, even Patsy. Simon had once sat for hours on a Sunday morning, pressing and tugging the damned thing. The hermit pulled at somewhere and squeezed somewhere else, and.....The top of the beetle's shell rose up.

"Ahh....It is still there, after over four thousand years." Said the hermit. "Look.....Just a harmless piece of bone."

Inside the golden base of the scarab, a setting had been created, as though for a precious stone.

Inside the setting was a piece of very old looking bone.

"Whose bone is it?" She asked.

"You have your secrets and I have mine....Touch it if you like, it might be interesting."

"I have touched enough for today and I promised Tim the best burrito in the city.....Put our chain back in the bag please Tim."

The hermit was so intent with looking at the scarab, that he barely seemed to notice them leave.

Laura was close to adding him to her list of people she sort of almost liked, so she had to leave him with a mild warning that was really a threat.

"I'm sure we both have reasons to keep our transaction private hermit....Please don't mention it to anyone else. I'd hate for us to fall out over it."

"Don't worry, I won't tell anyone."

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"Are you feeling better this morning?" Asked Nicola Jordan. "You had me worried last night."

"I had myself worried, but I'm thinking better today." Said Anthony.

Anthony Jordan looked at himself in the full length mirror on the wardrobe door and liked what he saw. His pinstripe navy blue suit wasn't that expensive, though it fitted him perfectly, which made it look expensive. A white shirt from the same people who'd sold shirts to Prince Philip, and a really nice silk tie to set it off. His shoes were his real thing, he was addicted to black leather brogues. No composite soles, everything had to be leather. They didn't quite get into the mirror, so he had to look down.

"Fucking things cost a fortune to repair, but they're worth every penny." He muttered.

"Have you got time for breakfast?" Yelled Nicola from the kitchen.

"Just toast."

Anthony went back to admiring his shiny brogues. He had five pairs, one for every working day of the week. Sometimes if a sales pitch wasn't going well, he'd quickly glance down at his shoes and know that everything was going to work out. It was amazing how often that had given him enough confidence to close the deal. He walked into the kitchen, where one of his kids was trying, unsuccessfully, to feed Rice Crispys to their cat.

"You won't like it when she scratches you." Said Nicola.

Home sweet home and he wouldn't have it any other way. Anthony picked up a slice of buttered toast and held it away from him as he ate. There could be no risk of crumbs on his shirt, or the ultimate horror, a blob of butter on his shoes.

"You must be feeling better." Said Nicola. "Up for two hours and you haven't yelled about anything, not even the guy next door mowing his lawn at six thirty."

"You know me, I'm not one of those guys who has his solicitor on speed dial." He said. "For one thing they know how to charge. I did call mine yesterday though and it was quite encouraging."

"We're talking about the vanishing Simon business I assume?"

"Yes and there is light at the end of the tunnel.....Stop teasing Tiger honey, she will bite you.....So, it appears it's too early to do much, though he is going to send a letter to the bank, just so they're

aware of the situation. Then, if Simon doesn't show up in a few months, there are procedures to deal with it."

"He'll show up, he did invest all that money in the company." Said his wife.

"I think so too, but I am going to advertise for a sales manager to cover his job for a while. I was even thinking of asking Ronnie to come back."

His wife had a certain look he'd learned to ignore at his peril. A kind of look that shouted he was about to do something daft, but said without her actually saying a word.

"You think getting Ronnie back would be a bad idea?" He asked.

"Dreadful Feng Shui, having her in the office will remind you about Simon leaving you in the lurch. You'll keep pestering her about him, and.....Ten to one she'll say no anyway. No point in sticking your chin out, just to have it punched."

"You really think she'll say no?"

"Yes I do."

"Yeah.....I'll advertise for a sales manager and a couple of trainees."

Anthony had a favourite sales training guy who came into the office a couple of times a year. One of the recurrent themes of every training session was about not inviting negative replies. Asking Ronnie to work for him again was almost begging for a negative and he'd had too many of those recently. He kissed Nicola and both of his kids goodbye and left the house. The air near his car had the wonderful smell of new mown grass. As he opened the car door, he looked down at his shiny black brogues, just for a second.

"Everything will be alright." He muttered.

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The Unnamed One still had a tiny amount of Liz in her, the human, as she walked towards the ceremonial altar. She-He-It had no real gender and 'she' was as meaningless as 'he'. There were none of the genital parts necessary to breed, yet she still thought of herself as feminine. Not all of the human side would go after she'd become the guardian of the last gate, a tiny fraction of a percentage would remain, though not enough to be a problem.

"Soon I'll be free of you Liz Grant." She muttered.

The underworld wasn't just dark, it was worse than simple darkness, far worse. Most people think that darkness is the opposite of light; it's a fairly obvious assumption to make. Not in Duat though, the true deepest level of the underworld. The dark there is dark energy that sucks any remaining life force out of those cursed to be there. The darkness is all pervasive, eating right into their immortal souls. Very few were immune to the corrosive effect of dark energy, just her and a few other creatures who were far older than mankind, or planet Earth. They alone had eyes capable of seeing in the darkest places, and the Gods of course. The Gods would be there to see her fight the old guardian and accept her duties, though they'd take no part in the ritual.

"Liz.....I'm here."

To her right was a tiny version of herself, almost a parody of her swollen body covered in writhing tentacles. She was tempted to simply swat it away or crush it, but something about it hinted that the annoying image of herself was important.

"Don't test my patience, whatever you are."

First she had to fight the last Guardian, the current vessel that held the essence of the Unnamed One. Once it would have been a true battle to prove the strength and brutality of the challenger. She knew that there would be no other challengers; the position was hers for the taking. The existing

guardian wasn't even likely to put up a fight. She could see it there in front of her, crouching in front of the altar and close to death. The strange tiny version of herself followed her to the altar.

"Are you ready to release the essence of the Unnamed?" She asked.

"Defeat me in combat and end my life. Then the essence is yours."

There would be no real combat, the poor creature was already close to death. Like her it had once been a formidable slayer, a many limbed creature of the ultimate darkness. It was actually quite sad to see what the ravages of an immense period of time would eventually do to her.

"Defend yourself." She yelled.

There really was nothing sadder than old legendary slayer. The beast tried to stand up, but offered no real defence as her tentacles tore it apart. They were there to watch of course, the old Ancient Gods. Some had conspired to prevent her becoming the new Unnamed, though she didn't hold a grudge about it. Everything was a game to them of course, all of creation and everything in it. Being angry at the Gods was as much use as being angry at a rainy day, or a wind that always seemed to be blowing right in your face.

"You are over....I wish you a safe trip to wherever you're going." She muttered.

She suspected the old guardian wouldn't be leaving the darkness of the underworld, only as a prisoner now rather than a guard, though it would be impolite to mention it. As the outgoing guardian died, it released the essence of the Unnamed. One of the Gods moved forward a little to speak.

"I Osiris god of the dead, of resurrection and eternal life....Welcome you as my new guardian of the underworld. Kneel now and complete the ritual."

As she absorbed the released essence it pushed out most of what remained of anything human, apart from a very tiny little piece of Liz Grant. The new Unnamed knelt in front of the altar and began the ancient litany.

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