

Festina Lente

(Season four of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 20 – The Koreans

“The building was the almost obligatory anonymous looking warehouse in South East London. Not far from Thamesmead, on a trading estate built where the Woolwich arsenal had once stood.”

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Daniel hated spending money. If there was a cheaper option, he always went for it. The amount he'd spent on an air ticket from London, plus the taxi fare from Aberdeen to his small holding.....He was actually feeling physical pain in his guts. Nothing to do with being Scottish, though Laura had often teased him about being the stereotypical tight Scotsman. Daniel wasn't totally sure of where he'd been born, though it was probably in the middle east, in the area north of the Dead Sea.

“What's this.....No tip ?” Asked the taxi driver.

It was about eighteen miles by road, from Aberdeen to Pitmedden. The taxi fare was more than it had been the last time and they'd definitely taken the scenic route in a few places. On the other hand, the local cab company had black listed him once. It seemed they hadn't liked his attitude. Now Gwen was living with him, there could be no upsetting the cab company. At least not until after he'd bought her a new truck. Daniel added another five-pound note to the pile in the driver's hand. Daniel missed paper one-pound notes. You could drop one of those into a cabbie's hand, without looking tight.

“I'm sure we went through Kingswells twice.” Said Daniel.

“Give Gwen my regards.....And my sympathy.”

No anger, no yelling, no dragging the driver out and draping over the bonnet of his car. That had been the old Daniel. Now he was civilised, though only out of necessity. He got his bags off the rear seat and walked towards the house, the place he thought of as home. He'd scrubbed himself for half an hour in the shower before leaving Mabina's house, to remove any trace of her. He was still nervous that Gwen might smell her on him. By the time the cab had turned around and was heading back towards Aberdeen, Gwen was halfway to where he was standing.

“Daniel, I've got so much to tell you.” She said.

He dropped his bags and hugged her. Her arms went around him and Daniel wanted to stay like that forever.

“I hate London.” He muttered.

“Come inside, I need to tell you about Jack.”

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Two days to clear rubble out of the temple and it looked far less scary at night. There were two oil lamps now, lit for an hour or so every evening. The lamps were lit for no other reason than claiming ownership of the ancient temple. They were telling anything lurking among the ruins, that the building was now theirs. Activity had brought the attention of their new friends in the settlement, but only during daylight hours. During the night, the villagers kept to their yurts and tents.

“I think it looks.....As clean and tidy as it's ever likely to be.” Said Giovanni.

Simon had a head full of information on Leptis Magna, not all of it necessarily accurate. Making the temple fit for a ceremony of some kind was important though, they'd all agreed on that. Once the

lamps were lit there was an eerie feel to the temple, which felt perfect to Niña. They were waiting to talk to dark powers, she was sure of that.

“Now we wait.....For close to three weeks.” Said Simon.

“I heard the growling by the water again.” Said Niña. “Those that lurk there don’t worship the deities of these temples. I feel they may decide to do something about our being here.”

“Has Donna spoken to you ?” Asked Giovanni.

“No, not once since we arrived here.”

“Maybe we should call out to her.” Said Juliana.

Niña had been surprised that Simon hadn’t banned Juliana from the temple. She’d expected Juliana to refuse to obey him and a huge row to ensue. Simon had mentioned it to her briefly, that he considered the temple to be fairly safe.

“It was once the home of powerful Roman deities.” He’d said.

So, Juliana was with them and calling for Donna to appear, actually sounded a good idea. The lamps had just been lit for the evening, as the sun set into the ocean.

“Sound worth trying....Let’s call out to Donna.” Said Niña.

Simon began, with them all joining in, once he’d set the pace and words.

“Donna.....Come to us.....Show yourself.” They all said.

“Louder, much louder.” Said Juliana.

“Donna.....Come to us.....Show yourself.” They all shouted.

It began as a cloud of smoke that looked vaguely like a woman. Soon, Donna was there, though she looked anxious. The growling sound seemed to follow her into the temple.

“It follows me.....Defend yourselves.” Said Donna.

The apparition of the dead maid faded and vanished through the temple wall. The phantoms following her looked fairly nebulous, but they could hurt the living, and vampires. Three of them, with several arms ending in long, sharp claws. Their shape kept changing, so identifying them was impossible. Arms and legs, though how many of each was unclear. A head, though mercifully no jaw full of sharp teeth. The claws were bad enough. One of them barely seemed to touch Niña, yet a deep wound opened up on her forearm.

“Damn.....These things can hurt us.” Yelled Niña.

“If they’re solid enough to use their claws, I can hurt them.” Said Giovanni.

Simon yelled as three deep gouges appeared in his leather jerkin. Judging by his reaction, the wounds went right down through his clothing and into his back. All of them had the best blue steel blades, even Juliana. A strange battle began, with the living trying to fight the ghostly phantoms. It was like trying to fight a fog. As Niña struck, again and again, she noticed pieces of the phantom break away. Tiny pieces, like blood from wounds. As they touched the temple floor, the pieces of fog, became tiny pools of red blood.

“Keep hacking at them.....They bleed.” Shouted Simon.

Niña felt wound after wound, as the phantom’s claws penetrated her clothes. Most were shallow, but there were enough wounds to concern a vampire. Niña looked towards the one of them without impressive healing ability. One of the phantoms was ripping into Juliana, shredding her clothes.

“Simon.....Juliana needs help.” Shouted Niña.

Giovanni had luck on his side, though even he could never explain the blow. Life is full of what ifs, especially the long life of a vampire. Without Giovanni’s lucky blow, things could have ended very differently. Niña saw him hit one of the phantoms where most creatures have a neck. The assassin’s

blade bit deep, the phantom actually cried out in pain. It crumbled into pieces of rotting flesh, which fell to the ground.

“What in hell are we fighting ?” Yelled Giovanni.

Simon began to use his blade on the phantom attacking Juliana. Niña was actually feeling weak, so she could imagine how badly the human girl had to be injured. By constant hacking with their blades, they killed another of....Whatever they were. Simon had talked about Leptis Magna during their journey. A place of old evil, ancient darkness, he'd called it. The phantoms were probably part of that ancient darkness. As with the first to be killed, the phantom became a pile of rotting flesh, as it hit the floor. As Niña turned to help, Simon killed the last of the ancient darkness. As it fell apart, Simon was with Juliana, holding her in his arms.

“How badly is she hurt ?” Asked Giovanni.

There was a lot of blood on Juliana's clothing and even more on the floor. Too much for a vampire to lose and Juliana was a human girl. Niña assumed that Simon's lover was going to die. Too late to stop the bleeding and anyway....There were too many wounds to deal with. Juliana would be dead within a few minutes and Simon would mentally fall apart. Niña was sure of it, that was the only way matters could play out.

“She still breathes.” Said Simon. “Help me, we must bandage her wounds.”

“Not here, not with the stench of decay all around her.” Said Niña. “Carry her, take her out of this dreadful place.”

More luck, or maybe someone was watching over them. Giovanni could never explain that lucky blow and Simon never could understand why he'd taken Juliana deeper into the temple.

“No, she stays here until morning.” Said Simon. “The temple won't let her dies, I'm sure of it.”

There was a slight glow on the tiled floor, where Simon gently placed Juliana. No bandaging her wounds, no attempt to stop the bleeding. Simon said it over and over again.

“We leave her here until morning. Then we'll tend to her wounds and change her clothes.”

Of course, they all remained in the temple to guard Juliana, though Simon thought the phantoms wouldn't return, at least not for some time. Niña went for a bucket of water for them to wash in and there was no growling sound near the water. Something had changed, an old evil had been defeated in some way. On the way back Donna appeared, though only for a few seconds.

“You won't see me again until you leave this place.” Said Donna. “My presence brings them out of the darkness. Juliana will live, Simon was right. She will be close to death for a while, but the temple won't let her die. You can trust the temple.....But only the temple.”

Niña had removed her own clothes and washed at the well, but she helped the other two clean the blood from their bodies. She told Simon what Donna had said, which seemed to comfort him.

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The building was the almost obligatory anonymous looking warehouse in South East London. Not far from Thamesmead, on a trading estate built where the Woolwich arsenal had once stood. Clara had taken two quick walks past the building the week before, but that had been the extent of her personal reconnaissance of the building. She considered looking the place over to be essential, but there was always the chance of being seen. Not only people looking at their old house or neighbourhood, used Google street view. It was also the criminal's friend. She'd spent a long time on many virtual walks around the building, and the streets close by. It was now her neighbourhood, as familiar to her as the streets near the house in Hornsey. Pixelation could be a problem, but not if you're willing to come at an area from many different directions.

“There.....Park right up against the wall, Patsy.” Said Clara. “There are no cameras for about fifty yards.”

A black SUV, which was another almost obligatory part of any criminal enterprise. Clara had thought of hiring their vehicle using a fake driving license. Tom had the ideal vehicle though, one used on a messy drug buy and destined for the crusher. A change of plates and the SUV would be perfect for one last job. Patsy carefully mounted the narrow pavement and got the SUV about a foot away from the wall.

“Oh, I love the way this thing drives.” Said Patsy. “Is it really going to be crushed after we’re finished with it ?”

“Yes, it’s already been involved in a fatal shooting.” Said Clara. “And after tonight.....”

Clara raised her eyebrows in a meaningful way.

“Yeah, fine....I get it.” Said Patsy.

“I know a dealer who can get you one.....He’ll give you a decent discount.” Said Ronnie.

“No.....A nice idea, but everyone will wonder how I could afford it.”

They all knew the plan, there’d been sessions with them all walking the streets via street view. Patsy had the easiest job, at least in theory. She was going to wait in the SUV, ready for a fast getaway, if it was needed. Patsy had been given an untraceable gun, just in case. Or more accurately, a gun Tom claimed could never be traced. Clara trusted Tom, but if Patsy needed to use the gun, it would go into the Thames that night.

“Don’t fall asleep.” Said Clara.

“Hey.” Said Patsy.

There is no way not to look sinister, dressed in dark clothing and carrying a cricket bag. The bag had a few other useful items in it, but mainly it held an assault rifle and a few stun grenades. Nothing high tech or the latest thing, but everything Tom provided was like that.

“Functional, reliable and will last forever.” Was how Tom had put it. “Like that fridge your grandma bought in the eighties.”

They both had the same weapons, her and Ronnie. Clara was hoping though, to go old school and use her fangs more than bullets. Besides, gunfire would start the clock rolling for the arrival of the boys in blue, the police. There were sound suppressors, but none of them worked anywhere near as well as the ones in TV cop shows. Plus, they had a dreadful effect on accuracy.

Luckily, they didn’t see another living soul, on the way to the warehouse. According to the records there was no alarm at the warehouse, at least there wasn’t one connected to one of the call centres who call the police if anything untoward might be going on. Such lists were private, but Tom had a lot of police contacts. There might well be a fire and smoke alarm, but Clara wasn’t concerned about those.

“Alright, Ronnie.....Nothing fancy and stay well back.” Said Clara. “Let me do most of the heavy lifting....But don’t be scared to use the assault rifle. It’ll take the cops at least twenty minutes to arrive and that’s if anyone around here can be bothered to call them.”

“Is that long enough ?” Asked Ronnie.

“Oh yes, that will be long enough..... Keep behind me as much as you can.”

The door looked fairly solid, but the breezeblock wall didn’t. Simon had taught her a lot over the years, especially about gaining entry to places, someone wasn’t keen on you being. Often it was better to ignore a door and attack the doorframe, or even the wall. It took Clara about seven hefty kicks with the bottom of her boot, to make a decent size hole in the wall.

“Pull your mask up.....Here we go.” Said Clara.

Inside the warehouse it wasn't completely dark, but there wasn't that much light either. Just the glow from a few lights above doors and few strip lights in prominent places. The kind of lighting left on to stop a night security guy from falling over the furniture. It suited Clara fine, her vampire night vision was just about perfect.

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The meeting had been arranged by cell phone, which had felt weird. Laura was a child of the modern age of twenty-four seven communications, but it still felt weird. Using phones to arrange a meeting with a dragon deity, the guardian of the last gate to the underworld and Brendan. Alright, Brendan was a normal human male, quite likeable actually. The rest of them though.....Arranging things by phone had felt decidedly weird. Laura thought the Old Gods did it right, using minions to carry their messages and orders to the faithful, or those not in a position to say no. She really couldn't picture Horus ever using an iPhone.

"I know the realm of dreams of course." Said the dragon. "There are places where it merges with the areas between the worlds, the grey places. I have no problem with going there, though the lack of linear time, may cause problems. There will definitely be consequences."

Laura had organised the meeting with Liz, who had her own way of keeping in touch with Karkengara, the bringer of fire. Laura hadn't intended Brendan to be involved. He was a nice enough guy, but he had no special abilities. It looked like there was going to be a huge battle in Jack's world. Definitely a war waged by those with super powers of some kind. Brendan wasn't likely to survive long in that kind of battle. Still, Liz had insisted on him being there. Liz thought couples should have no secrets from one another. Laura thought Liz was strangely naïve for a servant of the Ancient Gods.

"Huh considers that no problem can be as bad as the destruction of our world." Said Laura. "On the whole.....I tend to agree with him."

"So Laura, what's the plan?" Asked Brendan. "I need to be in Surbiton this afternoon. Someone wants a quote on a loft conversion."

Brendan might be useful after all. He'd be the one to ground them. The one who'd always have a need to be in somewhere else, to earn an honest living.

"You know we'll all be there, Laura." Said Liz. "We don't need convincing.....What is the plan?"

"The quick version is that you all go to the realm of dreams." Said Laura. "Everyone with something to contribute will go, no matter what timeline they're currently on. Huh seems to think Simon's new protégé will be useful, Niña. At just the right moment I will show myself to Q'uq'umatz, the great feathered serpent. Once I'm sure he's following me, I'll drop into Jack's world...."

"Then we kill the oldest of the old Gods." Said Karkengara. "The world will change Laura. The great serpent created this world. You can't destroy your creator, without causing changes."

"What sort of changes?" Asked Brendan.

"We shouldn't dwell on such things." Said Liz.

"And you should know, Liz." Said the dragon. "We have an expert among us, the keeper of the final gateway. Liz has all the memories of previous keepers. She knows what might happen, if Q'uq'umatz no longer exists."

Laura had an instinctively bad feeling about Karkengara. Sometimes on their side, but then he'd try to create discord among the group. Liz had told her his demands for sacrifices were constantly growing. Eventually, Liz would have to slaughter the population of a small town, to keep the dragon happy. Not that Laura could mention that, Liz had sworn her to keep it secret.

“Just very old texts that mention all sorts of nonsense.” Said Liz. “None of it is verifiable.....We need to kill Q'uq'umatz. Everything else is a pointless distraction.”

“We all deserve full disclosure.” Said Brendan.

Laura hadn't seen that coming, though if she was being honest.....

“Brendan is right.” Said Laura. “Put any fake news warning on it you like, but we're not children. Tell us the worst Liz ? We can handle it.”

Liz became the guardian of the gate for a few moments, though only her face. Liz briefly vanished, leaving a face that wasn't human, not even slightly. Dark grey skin, dark slits for eyes and there was an aura about her, which was quite scary. When Liz returned, she looked older and very tired.

“There are stories about creation, that are older than any religion.” Said Liz. “The stories are far, far older than mankind. Creation is just tinkering with what has always existed. The fabric of the universe will always exist, though it can be changed and made in the image of any God with sufficient power and imagination. Water should be a gas at room temperature, but we all simply accept that it isn't. Gravity, electromagnetism, all show strange anomalies, before we even mention black holes, the ultimate singularities.”

“Mumbo jumbo, religion always ends up as mumbo jumbo.” Said Brendan.

“No, not at all.....The effects from destroying Q'uq'umatz could be nothing at all, or huge enough to destroy worlds. All our physical laws, the way our universe supports intelligent life. Just imagine if those laws die with the God who wrote them into the universe's rules. Supposing mass attraction no longer existed.....No gravity.”

“Realistically.....What do you think will happen, if Q'uq'umatz no longer exists ?” Asked Laura.

“Nothing extreme, there are certain safeguards.” Said Liz. “At the worst a few minor inconveniences. Water might boil at one degree higher, or gravity might decrease a little. Nothing worth worrying about, nothing at all.”

“What are these safeguards ?” Asked Karkengara.

“Nothing for your ears.” Said Liz. “The universe always was and always will be. Even the Gods are children compared to.....I will say no more.”

“All very awe inspiring, but I still need to be in Surbiton.” Said Brendan. “Loft conversions need to be quoted for. How do we get to Jack's realm of dreams ?”

“I'll contact Liz when the time seems right.” Said Laura. “No excuses, not even an entire street of loft conversions. When Liz calls you, they will arrive soon after, the beings to take you to the world of dreams.”

“Are Huh's minions going to take us ?” Asked the dragon.

Laura knew, it was just that she had a mischievous side to her personality. Keeping it as a surprise was irresistible.

“Oh no, these beings will be far more....Awe inspiring, to use Brendan's words.” Said Laura. “Go about your business, but once Liz lets you know, they will be on the way.”

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Ronnie Neophytou had run behind Clara, towards the stairs at one end of the warehouse. Clara moved like the wind and was at the stairs, by the time Ronnie was only halfway there. Not that losing Clara really mattered, Ronnie remembered the layout of the building.

“The offices are on the top floor and the mezzanine.” Clara had mentioned, often. “I suspect the top bosses will be in the mezzanine.”

A contact had managed to bribe one of the junior people working for the Koreans. It was the right place on the right night. The top bosses were there for a meeting and some fun afterwards. It had

been a good year for the Jopok, the Korean equivalent of the yakuza. They'd be celebrating hard; hookers had been hired. Not that Ronnie thought the party would still be going on. There might be a few working girls on the premises, but most would have left. With luck, the bosses would be on the top floor, very drunk bosses.

"Cyril would like paperwork, any we see." Clara had said. "Ideally, he'd want us to open cabinets and bring him the contents. Meanwhile the police would be queuing up outside. We're going in fast and killing anyone who looks important. I know the faces of the top guys; I'll take care of them. Then we get out, just as fast as we went in. Cyril will be happy with that, I know him."

"Can I help myself to any cash I see?"

"Yes Ronnie, but don't take too long over it."

Being well paid and with a licence to loot the place. For Ronnie it was heaven, as long as the opposition didn't have time to get organised. Being shot at by the Korean yakuza didn't sound like heaven. Ronnie was halfway up the stairs when she heard someone scream. A man and he seemed to be in agony.

"Clara has begun.....I don't envy these guys." Ronnie muttered.

By the time she was at the top of the stairs, the lighting was down to a handful of emergency lights. Probably Clara at work, she thrived in the semi dark. Ronnie, on the other hand preferred light, as much of it as possible. She began to walk along a corridor, with darkened office on either side. Nearly all the office doors were open, which made it even more scary. It reminded her of a computer game, where burning zombies leapt out at the unwary. It was silly, but Ronnie had to shout.

"Clara.....Where the fuck are you?" She yelled.

It gave away her position and there was no comforting reply. When a man fell through an office doorway, Ronnie knew Clara had been feeding. Half his throat had been ripped out and blood was dripping down, staining his expensive double twist suit. Ronnie knew what Clara was, but seeing the effects....That was something different.

"Shit.....Shit.....Shit." She muttered.

It was absurd, but Ronnie distinctly heard laughter coming from behind her. She turned and for a moment, the large shape of a man was in the shadows. As he took another two steps, she could see him by the glow of an emergency exit sign. Tall and wide, with what was probably a gang tattoo on the left side of his neck. It was the mixed martial arts champ, the Korean gang's alleged executioner and enforcer. Noah had always fancied his chances in a one-on-one fight with the massive brute. Seeing him in the semi-darkness, still laughing.....Ronnie was sure Noah would lose the fight.

"I know you.....Bitch." The man shouted.

When Ronnie had slung the assault rifle over her shoulder, she'd shoved a stun grenade into her pocket. She had no idea why she used the grenade and not the rifle. Battles are stressful and stress can give birth to weird decisions. Ronnie threw the grenade and watched as it bounced off the floor, before landing at the feet of the Korean's enforcer.

"That won't hurt me.....Nothing can hurt me." He yelled.

A weird reaction, though it was party night. The huge enforcer was probably high on cocaine, or the new designer drugs. He yelled at her in Korean and pulled a gun out from under his jacket. Ronnie ran, waiting for a bullet in the back of her head. The glowing emergency exit sign seemed so inviting. There never was a shot from his gun, in the few seconds before the grenade exploded with a blinding flash.

A flash of seven megacandela, coupled with a bang of a hundred and seventy decibels. Anyone who thinks stun grenades are harmless, has never been close to one as it exploded. Ronnie's ears were

ringing and for a few seconds, she was effectively blinded. If she hadn't turned away, she might have been blinded for far longer. It was instinctive to rub her eyes and blink repeatedly. The huge Korean had been on top of the grenade. He was lying on the floor and not moving. So easy to have used the assault rifle to make sure he never got up, but there were certain lines Ronnie wouldn't cross.

Shooting an unconscious guy on the ground, was one of them.

"I'm out of here." She muttered.

She hit the bar on the exit door and it opened. There was a landing for a fire escape beyond the door and stairs leading down. There was also a wonderful fresh breeze, that brought back her focus.

Ronnie stopped and looked back into the warehouse.

"Clara." She mumbled.

Even a vampire could be hurt and Clara was in there, alone. Even when just a member of a teenage gang, Ronnie remembered having a thing about loyalty. She wasn't going to run away. Back through the door and a quick look at.....Where the huge brute of a guy, was no longer lying. He was gone, him and the large gun he'd been carrying.

"Fuck." Ronnie muttered.

Left seemed a good way to turn, left and away from where he'd been. There was no glowing sign pointing to the mezzanine, but the curved stairway going up; had to be the right way to go. Ronnie found the dead hooker at the top of the stairs. A tall pretty woman in skimpy clothing, with the left side of her throat ripped out. So much blood, the woman's expensive lingerie was soaked in it. It seemed Clara was happy to feed on anyone in the building.

"Dear Clara, please don't eat me." Ronnie muttered.

Past the dead hooker and Ronnie did what she'd been unconsciously doing since entering the building. She held up the assault rifle and moved towards where there was most light.

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Simon knelt beside Juliana, hoping his decision had been right. The temple had saved her, he was sure of it. By not bandaging her wounds, he had let her bleed for longer than she might have done. One of the maids was helping him, as they bound her wounds in clean bandages. Not enough bandages really, they should have brought more. One of his shirts and one of Giovanni's had been cut into strips. Morning now, just, and he could see the gouges in her arms, where the creature of the darkness, had used its claws on her.

"Oh, her poor face." Said the maid.

"Wounds become scars, which will fade with time." Said Simon.

They knew people in Florence, women with the ability to go into the forest and call upon the ancient powers. One of them would be able to remove the dreadful scars from her face. Or Alberti would know someone. Alberti knew people who could fix just about anything. The wounds were so deep though.....Simon wanted to cry over the damage to her poor face, but not in front of the maid. She was alive though, his beloved Juliana was alive. Giovanni was in a deep depression, though Simon knew that would pass. His friend was sat on a fallen pillar, while blaming himself for not reacting faster when the creatures had appeared.

"Why her?" Asked Giovanni. "She was no threat to them."

"She was just there, in the wrong place." Said Simon.

So many recriminations and weird theories. Niña had even been muttering about Alberti turning against them. All nonsense, it was divisive and helped no one. It was nice to find causes and villains to blame, but Simon knew.....Sometimes bad things happen to nice people. Even the pretty

daughters of Florentine nobility. Niña came in with fresh water and avoided eye contact with him. There had already been so many arguments.

“Is Juliana any better ?” Asked Niña.

“Her heart has a good strong beat.” Said Simon.

“We should move her away from this place.” Said Giovanni. “Juliana should be on the Mermaid, away from this evil place.”

“No.” Yelled Simon. “She will heal better here; the temple will keep her alive.”

“He’s right, the Gods of this temple have tasted her blood.” Said Niña. “They know her now and the temple will look after her.”

The support was unexpected. Simon looked at Niña and they exchanged a nod and a hint of a smile. Giovanni made a snarling noise and left the temple. He wondered what the maid was making of it all. Still, she was likely to witness stranger things before they returned to Florence.

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Clara had seen the electrical junction box on the way to the stairs. Turn it off and someone was likely to turn it on again. Whereas, a carefully jammed metal chair into the right spot and the lights wouldn’t be going on again that night. The emergency lights were perfect for her vampire’s eyes, but would leave the humans stumbling about. With luck, most of the junior staff would head towards the exits. Not the bosses though. For them, running away would be an unforgivable loss of face.

“Stay here Ho-Seok.....Wait for me to arrive.” She muttered.

Ho-Seok was the first name of the top boss, the boss of bosses for their entire operation in Britain. Clara had never bothered with second names, but she knew the first names of the top people and she had their faces in her memory. Clara had never seen the point in memorising huge amounts of personal details, on people not likely to survive her visit. It all seemed fairly pointless.

“Wait for me Ho-Seok.” She muttered.

Clara kept back against the wall, as a group of partygoers fled, heading towards the entrance. She looked over the faces, but none of them matched the key personnel she’d been paid to deal with. Just office staff and a few hookers in tight dresses and heels too high to safely run in. After they’d vanished into the night, Clara began searching offices.

She found Seo-jun hiding under a desk, in the dark. Not the most courageous place to be, but he was the finance boss for the British operation. Not a fighter, he actually screamed, as Clara dragged him out from under the desk. The first on her list to die, she fed on him by gulping blood, as it poured out of his ripped open throat. Seo-jun was still alive when she left his office, though not for long. If he didn’t drown in his own blood, he’d die of blood loss. Clara was in a hurry now, she wanted to kill the top bosses and be on her way. She did briefly wonder about where Ronnie had gone. She felt for Ronnie’s heartbeat and found her at close to the top of the stairs.

“At least she’s still alive.” Clara muttered.

The stairs to the mezzanine were close and Clara ran up them. A woman on the stairs, dressed in only expensive lingerie, complete with seamed stockings. High heels too, it seemed the local hookers liked their Blahniks. Clara might have left the woman alone, if she hadn’t thrown her arms around her neck.

“Don’t run away.” Said the hooker. “I’m sure I can find ways to keep you happy.”

The woman’s neck was so close, all that wonderful blood at body temperature. Live blood, that was certain to be delicious. Normally Clara could resist the animal within. Mastering the thirst for blood was an essential part of survival. She’d had a strange feeling since drinking from the finance guy.

“Oh, you can definitely make me happy.” Muttered Clara.

Sinking her fangs into that throat, ripping away the muscles to get at the blood. It all felt so much better than it usually did. It was as if it was her first time again, with that wonderful feeling of euphoria. Nothing in blood had ever really affected her before, but the Koreans might have taken one of their new designer drugs. There was a chance that it might have crossed her blood-brain barrier. Something to avoid, the beast inside her was far too incautious.

"Thank you." Clara muttered.

She dropped the dying hooker at the top of the stairs and felt for heartbeats. There were about half a dozen of them in one particular room. There'd be the rest of her kill list in that room. They had to be in there, all together, in the mezzanine. Her mind was fighting with the idea of killing them all quickly and leaving, or feeding on them all, every single one of them. The wonderful crimson blood seemed to fill her vision.

"Damn.....Shake it off girl, shake it off." She mumbled.

Her assault rifle had gone unused, but the need for a quick end to the night meant using it. A quick burst into the room and her job would be over. To calm the beast inside, Clara was thinking about taking one of the top bosses with her, to feed on later. A leisurely feed was always preferable to something hurried. She kicked open the double doors to the room. Her memory was suffering from the drug, but she remembered it was labelled as the board room on the building plans.

"Ho-Seok.....Are you in here ?" She yelled. "I've come for you, especially for you."

There were two emergency lights in the room, both giving off a dull yellow glow. Someone fired at her and missed, she heard the bullets hit the partition wall a good three feet away. Clara dropped the assault rifle. It wasn't just the awakened beast taking control, she wanted to finish them off with her fangs and strength.

"That wasn't very polite." She shouted.

Chairs and a desk in the way, but Clara easily leapt over them. Face to face with the man who'd shot at her. A guard, just a hired thug. She snapped his neck and turned. A group of faces in fairly bad lighting, but to her the light was fine. They were all there, the remaining top people in the Korean's British drug trade. He was there among them, a good three inches taller than the rest. Ho-Seok the boss of bosses, the one she was seriously thinking of taking home with her. If not home, she could think of several derelict factories where she could take her time with him. Someone fired a gun at her and the bullet pierced her abdomen.

"That won't stop me." She shouted.

Clara ran at them, indiscriminately breaking limbs as she arrived. No art to it, no finesse. She killed quickly and without mercy, everyone apart from Ho-Seok. There was a growing respect for the boss of bosses. He alone had pulled a knife out of his jacket. He alone had stood facing her, watching her move towards him.

"Come on, bitch.....This is where you die." Shouted Ho-Seok.

"Oh, Ho-Seok.....You'll regret calling me bitch."

So easy to sidestep his lunge with the knife. Then a quick blow to his chin and the head boss was on the floor. Clara was glad his heart was still beating, she had plans for him. The beast was still inside her mind, as she put Ho-Seok over her shoulder. The hold on her was lessening though, there was no longer a strong urge to rip open his arteries and feed on him, then and there.

"Ahhh, Clara.....I've been wanting to face you."

It was him, Baek-hyun, the martial arts champion. It was said he'd kicked half a dozen opponents to death in illegal fights. Add on the executions for his drug cartel bosses and his total kills had to twice that number, maybe far more. Tall, broad at the shoulders and muscular. He'd make a worthy

opponent, but what he was dragging behind him held Clara's attention. Ronnie's heart still beat, but she was battered and unconscious.

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