

Festina Lente

(Season four of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 11 – Temporal Anomaly

“Coldrum Stones may not look impressive.” Said Mabina. “Something happened here a long time ago and it left something behind. An energy soaked into the stones, creating a reservoir of power. On a good day, at the right time of year, you can almost feel the ground tingle.”

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It was a nice problem, but still a problem. Clara still wasn't comfortable with Felipe sleeping in the bed she'd shared with Simon. Using a hotel would be fun, room service always made her feel spoiled. That would mean leaving the house empty though. Considering what burglars might find, that wasn't a great idea.

“So, be honest.” She said. “What do you think ? I went for comfortable, but not too sleazy.”

The sofa was great, up to a point. They'd needed something with the space of a double bed, to be able to move around. Space was essential to physically express their passion, or something like that. Clara remembered reading an article in a magazine, probably Cosmo.

“Looks perfect, no squeaky springs.” Said Felipe. “Does this mean I'm invited to stay the night ?”

“If you want to.”

Simple really, every cushion from every chair and the sofa, had gone on the floor near the large bay window. The rest of the makings of the instant bed, had gone into the storage unit near the flatscreen TV. It had meant moving some of Simon's old VHS collection, but she'd never throw them out. A mattress cover to go over the cushions and two pillows. Add a couple of blankets for when the house cooled down in the early hours and the instant bed was complete. Clara had wondered about sheets. They'd make things feel less spontaneous though.

“We need to test it of course.” Said Felipe. “I can see it needing a lot of long, hard testing.”

Clara was wet before her knickers came off. Not making her thighs damp wet, but Felipe definitely pressed her buttons. Oral sex first, it had become an essential starter for their sexual repertoire. It threw spontaneity out of the window, but what that guy could do with his tongue.....

“Is it alright ?” Asked Felipe.

He'd flipped her over onto her stomach and for a second or so, she had no idea what he intended to do. As his hands spread the cheeks of her backside, the penny dropped.

“Yes, that's fine.” She replied.

Not part of her usual sexual idiolect, but a long way from being her first experience of anal sex. It gave her pleasure, even though she had no idea why. All those wonderful nerves packed in down there, it stood to reason that quite a few would fire off at just the right moment. Clara moaned and stopped trying to work out why it gave her so much pleasure. It did, that was all that really mattered. Plus, Felipe obviously enjoyed it and that was beginning to matter to her. Bonding of course, it was natural for people having regular sex. Even vampires weren't totally immune. Not love, but Felipe was her sexual partner and she wanted him to have a good time. Even the way she touched his dick had changed. More tenderness now, rather than just to get him hard. Clara was beginning to genuinely like Felipe. She just hoped he didn't become too inquisitive. She really didn't want to have to dispose of his body in a disused quarry. He'd already commented on her changing jobs, as if he was owed an explanation.

There came that point, where they'd both rolled away from one another and fallen asleep. At around five in the morning, something woke her up. It was that annoying thing, where she knew something had roused her out of a deep sleep, but had no idea what. Felipe was next to her, sleeping like a baby.

"There are times when I think this house is haunted." She muttered.

Clara found her panties. She might wander around the house almost naked, but never without knickers. Having a pee came first and if she was still wide awake, the coffee maker would go on. Maybe some cheese on toast. The woman in Lilac robes was waiting for her in the kitchen.

"Are you here about Simon?" Asked Clara.

She knew who the women in lilac robes were and who they served. By association, she'd begun to think of their presence as meaning there was bad news.

"Yes, but not in a bad way, Clara. Is now a convenient time to see him?"

"But it's five in the morning.....And I'm naked."

"The clothes aren't a problem; I can take care of that." Said the woman. "As to the hour.....Convenient temporal anomalies don't occur that often. If you wish to see Simon, I'd suggest you come with me."

"Of course, I'll come with you." Said Clara.

It wasn't really how she'd wanted to be when she saw Simon. She'd imagined some kind of prior noticed and being at least fully dressed. She still had the aroma of recent sex on her body. Felipe too, she could smell him on her.

"Do I at least have time to shower?" She asked.

"He won't care, Clara. Simon will be so glad to see you."

Several more women in robes appeared and as they touched her, the kitchen began to look unreal, as though part of a dream.

"Please, before we go....could I....."

"Too late Clara, the moment is here, right now."

Clara was surrounded by women in Lilac robes. So many, she thought it might be possible to drown in them. They pulled at her, sometimes being quite rough when doing it. She saw Simon, quite close, though he also looked a long way off.

"You're both in the anomaly.....Make the most of it, Clara. You have an hour."

With that she was alone, on a cobbled street. Dressed in a dress she wouldn't normally have worn to save her life, but it was better than being naked. It was a warm night, wherever she was. Warmer and more humid than most nights in London.

"Where the hell have they brought me?" She muttered.

Simon came out of a doorway, carrying a small wooden chest.

"Thank you, Silas. just what I was looking for." Said Simon.

As the door closed, Clara rushed towards Simon and hugged him. She heard him gasp, as he realised who had their arms around him. Simon put the small chest on the ground and hugged her again. He pulled her hair away from her face, as if checking it was really her.

"Clara.....How did you get here?" He asked.

"They brought me, Huh's minions. Didn't you know I was coming?"

"No, I don't think they do that."

They hugged again, so hard it might leave bruises. When the kissing began, Simon kissed her like a man who'd been at sea for years. She met his ferocity, pushing her mouth hard against his. Once she could get her breath, she pulled back from him.

“She.....Huh’s minion said we have an hour.” Said Clara.

“Silas has a stables.”

Simon pulled at her hand and she eagerly followed. There was the sound and smell of horses in the stables, which brought back memories from when she’d been young. It was warmer than outside; she had no worries about removing her dress. On a pile of straw, she was soon thrusting back, as Simon thrust into her. Clara realised there was no chance of her falling in love with Felipe.

This.....What they were doing, that was real love. It was brutal, it was fierce and totally physical. They were fucking the way only vampires can fuck.

“I missed you.....I love you, Simon.”

“I love you, Clara.....I always will.”

He’d go back to sharing a bed with the gorgeous Juliana of course and she’d go back to Felipe, on her instant bed in the lounge. Neither of them was capable of living completely alone. As Clara moaned, she knew that no matter what, Simon would always be the one she really loved.

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Daniel quite liked Mabina’s car, there was plenty of room in the back. They were both trying to change into clean, plain white robes. Surprisingly she’d had several sets of robes in a walk-in closet. One set was large enough to fit him, just. A tight fit, but Mabina had said being clean was the main thing.

“Nothing we wear can be even slightly dirty.” She’d said.

Mabina’s now dead husband had been called Roy, which had to be the world’s un-coolest name for a vampire. No wonder the residents of the house in Hornsey, referred to him as Vlad. Roy had good taste in socks and underwear though. Again, the clean boxer shorts were a bit tight, but they’d do for one night.

“Good.....I knew Roy’s thing would fit you.” Said Mabina.

Daniel knew that Roy had been a children’s entertainer. Need a guy to make animals out of balloons and keep your kid’s birthday party rocking ? Roy had been that guy. An odd choice of career for a vampire, but he’d been good at it. After his death, Mabina had dozens of calls from clients, all upset that Roy was now deceased.

“No, not like that.” Said Mabina. “Leave it.....I’ll tie the belt for you.”

It seemed everything had to be perfect, even the knot on the belt for the robes. Anything not quite right or the slightest hint of dirt and the magic wouldn’t work, or something like that. He trusted Mabina to be the expert, she had taken him to see the Wanderers chanting in a ruined temple in the high Andes. Her car was big, but tying his belt brought her close, while she was still dressing. Mabina wasn’t a woman he usually thought of in that way. It was just that she was only wearing underwear and her knickers were very sheer.

“There, that is how it should be.” Said Mabina.

Her cheek touched his and Daniel didn’t so much lunge, as let gravity moved his lips towards hers. No anger, no aggression....She even leant forward and kissed him back. Gently, though she had kept her lips on his for a count of at least ten. Then a hand was on his chest, gently pushing him away.

“Maybe another day, Daniel.” Said Mabina. “If a speck of dirt can fuck up our spiritual karma, imagine what sex can do to it.”

“Sorry, I should have realised.” Said Daniel.

Mabina had taken them to see the Wanderers using Liz’s instructions. The circle on the floor, the words in a long dead language, all of them as per Liz. Great, but it meant they could only visit a few locations Liz regularly visited. As Mabina wanted to use a neolithic site the Wanderers weren’t

currently trudging around, it had meant a trip to Kent. Carnac in Northern France had been an option, but that meant a plane journey with all the usual delays and anyway....Daniel still hated air travel and always would. A short drive to a country lane near Trottscliffe in Kent, was infinitely preferable. Daniel got out of the car on a deserted lane with probably not another living person for miles. He still felt vaguely silly and embarrassed.

"Oh, white robes will definitely....Never be my thing." He said.

"Yep, the flip flop sandals are doing you no favours either." Said Mabina. "Be happy in the knowledge that no one is likely to see you tonight, apart from me."

The lane ended at a gate to a field, but there was no obvious sign to say where they were. There might well have been one visible in daylight. All Daniel could see was a dark field, with a few trees against the glow of a nearby town. Mabina turned on a flashlight.

"I wasn't expecting Machu Picchu, but this...." Said Daniel. "No wonder you said the place has twenty-four seven access. It's just a farmer's field."

"Coldrum Stones may not look impressive." Said Mabina. "Something happened here a long time ago and it left something behind. An energy soaked into the stones, creating a reservoir of power. On a good day, at the right time of year, you can almost feel the ground tingle."

"Do you know what happened?" He asked.

"No, I don't think anyone does."

No flashlight of his own, he had to follow Mabina across the field and down a slight hill. There they were, the huge stones that looked like the entrance to a barrow, a neolithic burial mound. The ground definitely wasn't tingling. As he got closer to the stones there was something though, like the hum from a large electrical sub-station.

"Do you feel it?" Asked Mabina.

"Yes....Yes I do, there's real power here."

"Few humans feel it, I believe." Said Mabina. "They are less sensitive to such things than our kind."

The plan had been a little sketchy and that was being polite. After hearing the Wanderers chanting, or singing a new song, or whatever it was. Mabina had wanted to sing at an ancient site well away from the Wanderers' usual places. Why? That was where things got really sketchy.

"So, we're still going to try and summon a serpent God?" He asked.

"Q'uaq'umatz, though no, we're not trying to summon the feathered serpent." Said Mabina. "We did agree to this, though I'll grant you it was when we both felt the need to do something. I think we can draw a Wanderer here, a friendly one. A Wanderer like the one who followed me back to London. I don't believe all of them are hostile."

"We agreed on it in the comfort of your kitchen, after Thai food and wine." Said Daniel.

"Do you want to call it off, Daniel? I'd be disappointed, but no one is forcing you."

"It's just....What do we do if one of these wandering Gods, does appear here?" He asked.

"To be totally honest, I have no idea. It's like the detailed recipe for rabbit casserole....Step one, catch a rabbit."

They'd talked about at least twenty consequences of singing at Coldrum Stones. A good half had ended up with death, both of their deaths. Once Daniel wouldn't have cared, but there was Gwen in his life now. Plus, the smallholding was doing really well. It was bringing in enough money to pay all the bills and have a little left over. On the other hand, he had lived an incredibly long life.

Immortality tended to mean living until the bus ran you over, or the plane hit a hillside, or.....

"Alright, we do this." He said. "One day an accident with my number on it will come along. Certain to, just by the laws of probability."

“We both know there is no true immortality.” Said Mabina.

“Only for the Gods.”

“Yes, only for the Gods. And sometimes, not even for them.”

They’d heard the Wanderers chanting a new song and despite having no idea how, Daniel knew it. It felt like a memory, a very ancient memory. Something from way back had been Mabina’s idea.

“Something from when our ancestors were drumming stones on rocks in the rift valley.”

Had been Mabina’s idea and she may well have been right. There was something primitive about the chanting, something from a long time ago.

“We’ll start with chant number three, the newest we’ve heard.” Said Mabina.

At least it wasn’t a large area to walk around and the grass was fairly smooth and short. The work of sheep probably, as he couldn’t see a farmer bothering. Daniel walked and put in a skip to keep the rhythm of the words right.

“Sedit Rahmm Ozendah Nam

Sedit Nela

Ozan Rajen Sedit Omnal

Sedit.”

Words of power in a language he didn’t understand, but recognised. Had the ancestors of mankind once shouted out the summoning, right around the globe. It felt like sacred words to call an ancient power. His legs were tingling, as the stones themselves began to glow.

“Keep on, keep up the repetitions.” Yelled Mabina.

“Sedit Rahmm Ozendah Nam

Sedit Nela

Ozan Rajen Sedit Omnal

Sedit.”

Over and over again, he sung the words, until he felt intoxicated by them. A hundred repetition or two hundred, he wasn’t sure. Something changed, the stones were glowing brightly, but there was something brighter between them.

“It’s one of them.....We’ve called up a Wanderer.” Said Daniel.

“It’s beautiful.” Said Mabina.

It was, there was nothing vague or zoned out about the creatures. It glowed brightly and Daniel could feel waves of power coming from it. Like a human, but it had a birdlike head. Well over seven feet tall, they’d summoned a giant of the Wanderers. At that moment he understood.

“It’s not a Wanderer, we’ve called up something else.....Something different.” He said.

It was beckoning to them and Daniel didn’t want to fight the urge to obey. Mabina was no longer near him, she was already walking towards the glowing being.

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Simon looked at Clara through a kind of half-asleep happiness. He’d have gladly gone to sleep with her in his arms. There had been a mention of an hour though and their time together had to be nearly over. Sex was wonderful, but there was mutual gossip to share, probably more than they had time enough to tell.

“How is Laura ?” He asked. “Is she still with Tim ?”

“Yes, and she’s still working for the Silver Dawn. She’s also involved in some kind of antiquity thefts with someone you know. Laura is now in cahoots...Love that word, cahoots. Anyway, she’s working with Ronnie Neophytou when the Silver Dawn aren’t keeping her busy.”

“Good for Ronnie, she’ll probably end up running Tom’s empire, one day.” Said Simon. “How about you, did you go back to working at the hotel ?”

Clara would have her secrets, as he had his. He saw a shadow briefly come over her expression, though there wasn’t much light in the barn. They’d always had their private lives, even private from one another.

“I know this will sound weird, but Cyril hired me to do your old job.” Said Clara.

“Wow, that’s great.....But unexpected. Are you enjoying it ?”

“I didn’t think I would, but I am.” Said Clara. “I recently formed a kind of alliance with a Romanian mobster. I can see why you became addicted to the life.”

Simon kissed Clara and drifted again, just for a moment. Chatting in the afterglow of good sex was fun, but the clock was ticking. Worse still, he had no idea how long they had left. Clara must have been thinking the same thing.

“Did you save the girl ?” Asked Clara. “I know you thought she was important.”

“Yes, though she did catch the flux. Niña was dying, so I turned her into a vampire.”

“That is....Huge news.” Said Clara. “I saw the drawings on the wall change, so I thought she must have lived. One of the drawings of you and Giovanni, became a portrait of someone called Juliana.” Huh’s minions were so thorough, he should have seen that coming. Not the way he’d have chosen to tell her about Juliana, but their precious time together was ticking away.

“I must tell you; Juliana and I are.....”

Clara put her finger firmly against his lips.

“I did guess you were.” She said. “I’m seeing someone too. We’re both not suited to being alone, I do understand.”

No time to tell her about going to Syracuse, or the trouble with Alberti. He’d wanted to mention his mission to her. After Clara, the quest to truly understand Festina Lente, was the most important thing in his life. They arrived though, the minions of Huh. There wasn’t even time to dress, they took Clara away naked.

“Damn, they’re here....Kiss me, Simon.”

Halfway through a kiss and Clara was no longer in his arms. One of the women remained for a few seconds.

“I’m sorry, Simon.” She said. “The temporal anomaly was closing.”

“Will I see Clara again ?”

“Perhaps.”

There was a moment, as he found his clothes. He felt like the Simon in the twenty first century, cast adrift in the Italy of the Medici. The feeling faded, after he’d recovered the small chest from the pathway outside the stable. It was full of art supplies for Niña. The best inks, superb quality paper and enough pens and fine brushes to last her for a very long time. She’d wanted enough to be able to keep a record of their trip to Syracuse. Enough for a whole series of drawings. Simon had money now, enough spare cash to buy the best for their strange girl child.

“She’ll be so pleased.” He muttered.

He was back to being the Simon of that time, the one having a serious relationship with Juliana. There was Niña to think of too and the quest for the Brotherhood. He loved Clara, part of him still knew that.

“This is my time now though, where I belong.” He muttered.

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Laura had spent hours in the temple area that was two thousand feet below the hot, dry desert above. She was no expert, but spend enough time around archaeological sites and the basics soak in by a kind of osmosis. A temple gets built and suffers from age, or gets destroyed by a rival faction. They don't want to lose the significance of the location, so they build their temple over the ruins of the old one. Rinse and repeat for a hundred generations and you end up with a whole stack of ruined temples, with the current one on top.

"However, this is the oldest temple by several thousand years and it's still active." She muttered to Tim.

"What are those things?" Asked Tim.

There were lamps once they were out of the convenient gap in the rock wall. Not brilliant lighting, but good enough to see the altar room was being used. It was also showing several creatures stood near the altar.

"I've seen something like them before." Said Laura. "As long as we don't approach the altar or make too much noise, they'll probably ignore us. I think they're some kind of Akhens, minions of whoever built the original temple. They might even have been people once, I'm not sure."

Tall and large, with the mindless faces of brutes. Laura hadn't realised they were guarding the temple, until a dozen of them had attacked her. She'd killed several of them, but the creatures were incredibly hard to kill. If she hadn't found the sword, things could have gone badly for her.

"Awful, to think those things are descended from people." Said Tim.

"Might be, I'm not sure.....See that stone trough in front of the altar?" She asked.

"The grey one.....Yeah."

"That must be for offerings, I took the sword out of that." Said Laura. "Wow, did that piss them off. It's a really good sword though, one of the best I've used. There are several other items in the trough, including another of those gold buddha artefacts. I'm sure Nathalie would want to see it."

"I'm sure she would.....I can see where this is going. How are we going to steal it?" Asked Tim.

"Steal is such a judgemental word. It doesn't belong to these Akhen type creatures."

"Alright, how do you see us liberating it from these brutes?"

"Getting the sword out of the trough hurt, I mean really hurt." Said Laura. "A jolt of some kind, it might kill you. So, I need you to run around and keep them busy, while I grab the gold buddha."

"Hmmm....So, I'm the decoy mission." Said Tim.

"Don't say it like that, Tim. Where's your sense of adventure?"

"Every time you say that, we end up in trouble. Alright, I'll be the guy running about with a sword in his hand."

"That's the spirit, Come on." Said Laura.

"Now, we're doing it now?"

"We get the buddha and I'll use the Egg to go back to London tonight. I'll buy Thai food and your favourite beer."

"Fine."

Tim could have easily looked comical, but he didn't. Laura was proud of him as he brandished the sword, rather than merely waving it about. Twice he thrust the blade into the chest of one of the creatures. He even managed to make a tactical retreat look heroic. Laura would have cheered and shouted encouragement, but she was the one trying to keep a very low profile. The creatures were strong and dangerous, but didn't seem very bright. Once she was under cover, they probably thought she no longer existed.

"Hey, arseholes." Yelled Tim. "Come and get stabbed by my sword."

Tim seemed to be enjoying himself, as he gradually led the creatures away from where she was hiding. Not much of a hiding place, just the floor behind an empty trough. Good enough though, as the brutes weren't the sharpest knives in the drawer. Laura put Tim out of her mind, as she crept towards the offerings in front of the altar.

"No creeping behind me, you bastards." Shouted Tim.

No sound from the creatures, which made her even more sure they from the same roots as the Akhens she'd gone up against in Ethiopia. None of their dead near the altar and she had killed a few when they'd attacked her. Stupid or not, they seemed to take away their dead. Laura crept right up the edge of the trough. That was it, the last place she could remain hidden.

"Here we go." She muttered.

Laura stood up and there was no turmoil, no rushing crowd of brutes heading her way. They seemed too busy trying to surround Tim. They looked likely to succeed, the creatures had numbers on their side. Laura tried to forget about that and focus on the trough. There were other items in there, not just the buddha. A golden badge of office of some kind, though it might have been an ornamental medallion. The jade figure of a child was an easy choice, it went in the back pocket of her jeans. The medallion went inside her top, which left the buddha and a heavy looking statue of a hippo. One hand was needed for the buddha, it was the reason she was there in the first place. Her other hand was needed for fighting and getting a good hold on Tim, when they left. The hippo could stay, it didn't even look that well made.

"I bet if I leave you behind, you'll turn out to be important." She muttered.

A sixth sense was tingling, almost telling her as much. It meant shoving the buddha down her top. It nestled up against the medallion, where it scratched her skin and became ludicrously uncomfortable. Hippo in her left hand, dagger in her right, it was time to leave. No need for any further hiding.

"Tim.....We're getting out of here." She shouted.

Laura turned just in time to see Tim hit the floor. He'd been cornered, it had to have been what happened. Cornered and then hit, that had to have been it. There he was, lying unconscious on the floor. More of them moving towards him, probably intent on beating him to a messy pulp.

"Fuck." Yelled Laura.

Short distances were a problem with the Egg, sometimes. It would either work, or she'd end up somewhere like the Giza plateau. There was no halfway, short hops worked, or were a total disaster. A disaster would mean her being a long way off, as the creatures stomped Tim to death. On average, there was an eighty percent chance it would work. Laura concentrated on the floor next to Tim, before pressing her elbow against the Egg.

"Got you....."

A perfect short distance hop and Tim moved as she put her arm around him. There were two blows against her back, but Tim was alive and hopefully not too badly injured. Laura thought of home and pressed the Egg. Home was supposed to mean the apartment in Brittany, or as an alternative, their room in the local hotel. She'd been thinking of her apartment, but sometimes the Egg chose what it thought was best. Laura found herself in the house in Hornsey.

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Liz had been involved in quite a few activities that couldn't be called totally honest. For several years she'd earned a good income from being an escort. An educated escort who'd fit in anywhere. She'd once pretended to be the girl friend of a wealthy company CEO, at his company's Christmas party. That one night had earned her more than a secretarial role would have paid for two- or three-

months hard slog. No early morning tubes, trains, or the worst.....Grubby buses. Liz had enjoyed the life, but she loved Brendan. He'd never made a huge thing of it, but in the end, it was him or the escort work. She'd chosen Brendan and had never regretted it. Alright, maybe a little, sometimes, but he was worth feeling a tiny bit of regret. She'd paid tax, though not on everything she earned. Liz had been involved in a few scams, they seemed to come with the territory. She'd even taken a few packages with her on foreign trips, which might well have contained contraband of one kind or another. Still, like most of us, Liz considered herself to be basically an honest person.

"You could at least pretend to be interested." Said Liz.

"Just pick up anything that fits." Said Karkengara. "I never could understand all the effort people put into what they wear."

"That's because you don't wear clothes."

Despite a long list of dubious activities in her past, Liz was finding that shoplifting for clothes, was really bothering her. The shop needed to pay suppliers, but there simply wasn't time to arrive during daylight hours, select what suited her, try it on and then pay for it on her plastic. Plus, and it was making her feel guilty, it was fun not to have to care what it said on the price tag. As for the dragon who'd become her constant companion....He just looked bored, while making sarcastic comments. Liz had quickly learned to ignore his sighs, though his claw tapping on the floor, was still annoying.

"Oh, I like this blue top." She said.

"It really suits you, put two in the bag." Said Karkengara.

"Wow, you like it, really?"

"No, I was just hoping to speed you up."

A decent variety in the clothes store and so far at least, no security people had arrived to see who was midnight shopping. The last place not only had and a lot of CCTV cameras, they'd also had mobile security people who'd arrived with dogs. Liz had simply dropped into the underworld, before finding another store. She had a huge backpack, the kind used by expeditions to far away places. Perfect, as she might well end up in some very faraway places. Liz held the blue top against herself and committed one of the cardinal sins of fashion.

"Yeah, that'll do." She said. "It'll fit well enough."

Two of the tops went in the huge backpack, which already held enough new clothes to last her for a couple of weeks. Quite a lot of the space was taken up by knickers, which didn't make her feel guilty at all.

"A girl can never have too many pairs of knickers." She'd told the dragon.

He'd just sighed and thumped the floor with his claws for a while.

"Trainers.....No, boots.....Two decent pairs and we're done."

"What a pity, just when I was beginning to enjoy myself."

Karkengara had spent countless millennia in his ruined temple and he must have spent most of the time, perfecting his sarcasm skills. Liz liked him though, despite him wanting her to find creatures to be sacrifices in his honour. There wasn't a good selection of boots, proper boots. Lots of boots Cosmo would have enthused about, but nothing she'd want to walk far in. In the end Liz went for two pairs of solid looking trainers.

"There, shopping finished." Said Liz. "To think I once spent an afternoon in the Paris Versace, choosing a dress for a special occasion."

"Good, lets get going." Said Karkengara, the dragon deity.

Following someone across multiple worlds and places wasn't easy, even for her. Liz was tracking the unique trace of the creature's essence. The way hounds could track a scent, but hounds never had to

do it across the near infinite universe. Liz had taken them to a jungle on another world. They'd wasted nearly a day before realising the three creatures who'd been there, had moved on.

"I'll just check the latest location." She said.

"You need to find who is giving them their orders."

"I know.....We'll get to them, eventually."

The creatures weren't that clever, yet they were jumping across worlds. They were also seeking items of power, which were beyond their ability to use. Someone had to be giving them orders and providing them with a method of travelling anywhere. Liz put on her pack and held a large flashlight in her left hand. No stumbling around in a dark jungle again, she'd learned that lesson. There had been the question of Karkengara carrying a few things. His particularly loud snort indicated that dragon Gods didn't carry baggage. Liz concentrated and found the essence of those they were searching for.

"The location feels familiar.....Are you ready to go?" She asked.

"I was ready an hour ago."

Their method of moving around had developed too, they'd found out a few things by trial and error. Liz moved and the dragon followed her. Brief physical contact helped him follow her, though they had no idea why. Liz ran her hand over his shoulder, briefly feeling his hard scaly skin. Through the underworld and out again, the underworld was her equivalent of an airline hub. Out again then, to find herself.....

"I know this place. I was hoping to come here again, one day." She said.

"An impossible celestial configuration." Said Karkengara. "Someone engineered this solar system, it's not natural."

Liz had been there with Laura and Mabina and the amount of sunlight had burned the two vampires. Several suns and planets, aligned in a way to give the planet they were on, perpetual bright sunlight. There was a lot of ultra violet in the sunlight, which produced lush crops in places. Not where they were though, Liz had brought them to a sandy desert. It resembled Egypt, right down to the line of pyramids not that far away.

"I came with vampires last time." Said Liz. "The burns on their skin took days to heal."

"Vampires; disgusting creatures." Muttered the dragon.

"There is a gateway to the underworld here." Said Liz. "Last time we saw a city to the north, though there wasn't enough time to go there. They had flying machines I seem to remember. There are traces of the creatures we seek, coming from that city."

"Then we travel north."

"I should mention, that the people in the city have a reputation, though we never actually met them. They came after us, we barely made it to the door to the underworld, without a fight. The people of the city are hostile to all strangers."

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Tim was badly bruised, but nothing seemed to be broken. She wasn't an expert on human medicine, but all vampires can tell if a human is badly injured. It's a useful skill when hunting for a human to feed on. Tim moaned when moved and wanted to sleep all the time, but he wasn't going to die. Laura had left him sleeping in their room in Hornsey. Their room.....She was even thinking about it as their room.

"Thank you for reporting about the temple fairly promptly." Said Nathalie Aurigny. "Not that I'm sure what to do about the creatures. I'll need to discuss this with a few experts. No use hiring the best, if I don't listen to them."

“They are harmless down there.” Said Laura. “Dig down and you may give them a way out to the surface.”

“That is definitely something to consider. Now, what are these objects you’ve found ? I see one of them is the lost buddha.” Said Nathalie.

“Not the buddha, not the one that was stolen.” Said Laura. “All these objects were in front of the altar, probably as an offering to whatever deity was being worshipped there.”

“That is interesting.”

Nathalie took a set of rubber gloves out of a drawer, along with a duster and bottle of spray cleaner. The mild sort of cleaner, designed to clean priceless antiquities, without damaging them. Laura decided not to mention carrying the hippo inside her top. Nathalie even used a magnifying glass to examine the objects.

“I like the buddha, it’s in better condition than the one that was stolen. Have you discovered what it does ?”

“No.” Said Laura.

“They all do something.....I heard you upset the Bashir’s....Going on about a pool. Then you’ve been getting under Hassan’s feet at the dig. Good.....It shows you’re doing what I asked.”

Laura hadn’t brought the sword, she liked it too much to risk losing it. The Jade figure of a child was also in the Hornsey house, as a gift for Clara. Nathalie carried on polishing and examining the offerings from the temple.

“The medallion is nice, but not worth a lot....Let’s be honest, we all want to find a priceless piece of art. As for the hippo....Carvings of hippos are some of the earliest known works of art in the world.”

“Is that good, or bad ?” Asked Laura.

“Oh, good.....Very good.” Said Nathalie. “This is one of the best I’ve seen. It must have been down there since....I’d say at least five thousand years. Your small crudely carved hippo, would probably make a small fortune at auction. Then of course, a lot of people would want to know where it was found.”

“That would be awkward.” Said Laura. “I had assumed you’d want to keep these pieces in a vault somewhere.”

“Yes, that would be sensible. Go back to Sudan, Laura. Keep annoying Hassan and his wife. Find the stolen buddha and I’ll raid the security budget for a little bonus.”

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