

The Presence

Chapter 12 - Baphomet

“A temple built before the Sumerians arrived.” Said Drew. “Yet this likeness of Baphomet.....It’s the later image of Baphomet as the Sabbatic Goat. A nice clear image, of a face not used for Baphomet, before the eighteen hundreds.”

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Travis found himself trying to run across rough ground in the dark. Rough ground with bits of rubble scattered about and pieces of stonework from the temple. He had a lamp, but there was a general feeling of panic among the group.

“We need to save Marwa.” Nick had yelled. “The dead child isn’t what she thinks.”

What the dead baby actually was, had never been made clear. Nick was in a panic and Drew had seen everything he’d seen while in a dream state. That meant Drew was panicking too. Adie was typical Adie, worrying about anyone who might get hurt. Lately they’d had a few problems, but a crisis like this.....It reminded him why he’d asked her to marry him, after not knowing each other for very long. It had to happen of course, Travis was looking at Nick and his foot found a rock. Travis went over, tumbling across the dry ground. His shoulder found another rock, which hurt. Nothing serious though, he managed to get on his feet.

“Are you alright ?” Asked James.

Good old James, who was always trying to get everyone to be calm. He hadn’t hesitated to get everyone running towards the temple in the dark. There was definitely another side to James.

“Fine.....The lamps were worth the money.” Said Travis. “Rolled over it twice and it’s still working.”

“Just be careful.....We’re a long way from help.” Said James.

Someone shone a light straight at them, before running towards the ruins. It would have been chaos on a sunny morning. In the dark it was almost suicidal. Travis could run fairly well, but a pain at the back of his leg, hinted at painful days to come.

“Over here.....I’ve found her.” Shouted Nick.

It became a case of homing in on the growing group of lamps, while trying not to cripple himself by falling over rubble. There was a lot of rubble, but the right direction quickly became obvious.

Everyone was there before him. Nick and Drew were knelt on the ground, looking at Marwa and the bundle of rags she carried. Only then did Travis realise James was carrying one of their cheap, but lethal, assault rifles.

“Expecting bandits, James ?” Asked Travis.

“Wild dogs.....They really are a problem at the edges of the desert.” Said James.

They were close to the temple and Marwa had left tracks when she’d fled the ruins. Not just her tracks, something had been chasing her out of the temple. There was blood on the student and her clothing was torn. Still conscious though and aware of what was going on.

“I got her.....We can return the poor baby to its parents.” Said Marwa.

It had looked like a baby girl when they’d seen it in the temple. Being in the dry heat for some time though, it was so desiccated and shrivelled. It might well take a lab examination to be sure of its sex.

“You’re hurt.....There are wounds on your legs.” Said Drew.

"It was the dogs.....They were everywhere." Said Marwa. "One bit me so hard.....I made it though, I got outside."

The tracks didn't look like dog track to Travis, though he decided not to say anything. Adie had accused him of making a thing out of everything, so he was trying to cure himself of it. The tracks following Marwa had been left by a single heavy creature, probably walking on two legs.

"Can you walk, Marwa ?" Asked James. "We need to get back inside the truck."

"I'm not sure.....I'll try my best." Said Marwa.

Marwa let Adie take the baby from her, still wrapped up in it rags. With the help of Drew and Nick, the student could just about walk. Something had ripped her jeans apart and bitten a lump out of her leg. Or cut it out, Travis wasn't really buying into the attack by wild dogs. James covered them with the assault rifle, as they slowly trudged back to the truck.

Travis had looked it up while in London, when the deaths of Roger and Diane were being blamed by the police on wild dogs. He could still remember the two or three lines that had come up on Google. 'Rabies infections among wild dogs in Libya, are common. Rabies vaccines are not routinely available.'

There had been more, all the usual waffle. If Marwa had been bitten by an infected wild dog, she was extremely likely to die of rabies. On the other hand, the tracks in the sandy soil, hadn't looked remotely like dog tracks. No one else had mentioned rabid wild dogs, so Travis wasn't going to be the first to make a huge thing about it.

"Home sweet home." Said Drew. "I never thought I'd be so pleased to see our old truck."

"Solid walls and doors that lock.....I've called worse places home." Said James.

"Where do we put her ?" Asked Nick.

Travis knew his wife had been the designated first aider in her college dormitory. There had been a couple of refresher courses, all of them taken a long time ago. She put the dead baby down on the table where they ate, and took charge.

"On her bed roll, it's in a quiet corner." Said Adie. "Plus.....Any blood stains will be her blood. You're always less likely to pick up blood infections, if it's your own blood."

"I think I used that once.....In a short story." Said Nick.

"Someone get the first aid box." Yelled Adie.

Drew only mentioned Rabies quietly, but it wasn't a huge truck. There was a little mumbling and Travis knew they'd be calculating the odds of catching the disease from Marwa. Despite often acting the fool, Nick was sometimes quite clever.

"That isn't a dog bite.....I'd bet anything on it." Said Nick.

Would he bet his life though ? There was an incubation time for rabies, but Travis had no idea if that meant Marwa's blood was safe to get on their hands and skin. He wished he'd studied the articles better, the ones Google had shown him. Hind sight though, it was always twenty-twenty vision.

James appeared, he was bloody and it wasn't his own blood. He put the assault rifle away in its box.

"Nick is right.....No dog ever left that kind of bite." Said James.

"I know it's not something you want to hear." Said Travis. "But Rabies has been known to take six years to incubate in a bitten human. Rare.....But a medical fact."

"Fuck." Said James.

"Fuck indeed.....Though I too think Marwa wasn't wounded by a dog bite." Said Travis.

James looked likely to use an entire bottle of disinfectant to clean Marwa's blood from his hands. He needed something to take his mind off a potentially long, nasty and usually fatal infection. Luckily, there was something lying on the table that seemed to scream for their attention.

“Let’s unwrap the poor child.....See what we really have.” Said Travis.

“Yes.....Not what Marwa believes it to be.....According to Nick.” Said James.

It seemed wrong, to unwrap the baby among the remnants of their last meal. There it was, unwrapped and lying next to grubby plates and well-worn cutlery. Travis looked at the tiny body and knew it in an instant. He might have noticed it in the temple if there hadn’t been so much raw emotion being emoted by Drew.

“If I have one really useful skill, it’s knowing the age of a thing.” Said Travis. “It’s as if I can feel the few years a knock off relic had been around, or the thousands of years something like this dead child had been in existence.”

“So, you think the baby died a long time ago ?” Asked James.

“Not fully mummified, but work has been done on the body.” Said Travis. “North Africa was where everyone once headed. The Romans were putting the finishing touches to Leptis Magna in around.....Oh my memory.....Let’s say around fifty BC. Lots of other people brought their Gods to North Africa, and their religious practises. There’s something about this child though.....I’d say Egyptian in origin from around fifty to one hundred BC.”

“Well.....At least his parents won’t be worrying about him.” Said Nick. “Marwa is alright by the way, blood loss not as bad as it looked.”

“Her.....The baby was definitely female.” Said Travis.

It seemed Drew and Adie were still with Marwa, looking after her. They seemed to be the two most affected by finding the dead child. Was the Presence using their own maternal feeling against them ? Travis had no idea, but it was worth considering.

“So.....What do we do now ? Are we going back to London ?” Asked Travis.

“Personally, I can think of a lot still to be done in Libya.” Said James. “Remember.....Once we’re back in London, that will be it. End of trips abroad and anything we might learn here.”

“It was expensive to get here, and we did buy a truck.” Said Nick. “I’m for staying here for a while, just as we originally intended.”

“As long as we don’t all die of rabies.” Said Travis.

Travis kept forgetting that it wasn’t a huge truck.

“Of course we can’t run away at the first setback.” Yelled Adie. “Anyway, no way is this hole in her leg a dog bite. From what I heard, it’s similar to Marsha’s wound.”

Travis had his own ideas about what to do next and it didn’t include getting on the first plane back to Heathrow. Luckily, it sounded as though no one else was keen on that idea either. He was just about to give his views, when James beat him to it.

“Once Marwa is looked after, we all need to watch the recording of last night’s hypnosis session. We can then properly discuss the implications and the risks. Personally, I think we need to go down the stairs in the temple.....But in the daylight.” Said James.

“Yes, that would be a good first move.” Said Travis.

“You make it sound like a war.” Said Drew.

“It is a war !” Shouted Marwa.

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Sovi Björlund was beginning to feel the benefit of being connected again to one of the big league, a major Fleet Street tabloid. Of course, not much happened in Fleet Street anymore, but everyone still used the term. Gone were the days of hot metal printing and pubs full of seedy looking reporters.

“Really.....The police are really going to charge him ?” Asked Sovi.

A contact of a contact, asked to call Sovi as a favour. The woman on the phone was known to Sovi, though only vaguely. The information she had though, that was priceless.

"I'm told he'll be behind bars by tonight." Said the woman.

There had already been a call to say the tabloid's solicitors had green lit her story and now this.....It had the makings of being a very good day. Sovi ended the call with the usual pleasantries and looked at the others. Den was there, not even trying to hide her curiosity. Marsha was nearby, but genuinely busy with all the emails the story was already generating. It wasn't out in the wild yet, the story was going to begin life in a free evening paper. After that.....It would either take off like a rocket, or die like a damp squib.

"Oh, come on.....Who is going to be arrested ?" Asked Marsha.

"I bet it's the soldier." Said Den.

The soldier was an ex-soldier, a veteran of the UK armed forces, as the papers would probably call him. Seen drunk quite a few times and known to occasionally sleep it off, in a park not far from where Stuart Goodford and his wife had lived. Just a drunk with a few issues, until the locals in his favourite pub, had mentioned his constant hatred of anyone in authority. Add on three suspected, but not proven, burglaries in the area and the ex-soldier was perfect for the police.

"Yes, he's likely to be released in a few years, following a TV campaign of some kind, but for now.....There'll be enough to convince a jury to jail the poor guy." Said Sovi.

"I'm assuming you're no longer on the run from the police ?" Asked Den.

"So I'm told, though I'm not going to test the theory." Said Sovi. "For now, there'll be a lot more work to do on the story. Plus.....And, it is why Nick called me in the first place. I need to start expanding on the connections between the story and his new and sensational book....Yada-yada."

"I thought journalism would be all about.....The news." Said Marsha.

"Sometimes it is.....But I often feel like a slightly upmarket telesales person." Said Sovi.

"Can I spend the day with you guys ?" Asked Den. "The chair was on my lounge ceiling again, when I got up this morning. I think, there was a blood stain on the chair."

Poor Den, she'd been through a hell of a lot and unlike just about everyone else, there was no potential pot of gold at the end of the blood soaked rainbow. Sovi knew she wanted to move, but couldn't afford to. Soon, her flat might be worth a lot less than the remaining mortgage. There always seemed to be that one person in every story. The one everyone liked, but who ended up getting screwed.

"We'll be here for a while and there's a sofa." Said Sovi. "I can get you some bedding....So if you fancy it, the sofa is yours."

"That'll be great.....I'll go home later and pick up a few things." Said Den.

"Good news.....An email that the story will be on the front page in the morning....Fully confirmed by the chief editor." Said Marsha.

They all cheered and there was mention of champagne later and maybe something slightly better for dinner than a takeaway. Den joined in the cheering and despite years of building up a cast iron shell against such feelings.....Sovi was determined that Den wouldn't be that person.....The one who got screwed.

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Marwa had refused to be left on her own in the truck. Suggestions of leaving her just outside the temple, were treated with total rejection. As her wounds began to heal, her legs were stiffening. Adie had mentioned a few concerns, including.....

"Take her down those stairs and she might not get back up them again."

Marwa could be carried out; she was a fairly slender young woman. But carrying her out while maybe fighting off the thing, the monster, the Presence. Drew was pleased she'd said it, but knew Adie might never forgive her.

"Marwa needs to stay here.....Which means Adie should stay with her." Said Drew.

Travis kissed his wife on the cheek and Adie gave her the worst stink eye Drew had ever seen in her life, and she'd seen quite a few.

"Makes sense, my love." Said Travis. "You're the only one of us with medical training."

"I was a first-aider.....At college." Said Adie.

"I can set up one of the assault rifles for you." Said James. "Just pick it up, aim.....And pull the trigger."

No one thought bullets would hurt the thing that called the temple home. It was all over for Adie though, no more arguments. She had a look on her face, as if she'd been sentenced to permanent exile on a remote tropical island. They left Adie to look after Marwa and headed towards the ruins.

"She'll be alright.....My wife is the only qualified medic." Said Travis.

Drew felt guilty and suspected the others were feeling guilty too. There had been no other option though, other than tying Marwa up until they returned.

"It all looks so less scary.....In the daylight." Said Drew.

"Partly an inbuilt human preference to prefer well-lit places." Said Nick. "Partly, because there are less occult related attacks during daylight hours."

"Half as many, actually." Said Travis. "There is a saying about there being nothing there in the dark, that isn't there when the lights are on.....That's actually a long way from being true."

"Please.....I'm already anxious enough." Said Drew.

James was in front again, with a fully loaded assault rifle hanging over his shoulder. He looked moody, but Drew thought that was probably just his thing. He'd snap out of it if anything bad happened. The plan had been to ignore everything else in the temple and head straight for the stairs leading down. If they were still there of course and not some kind of induced hallucination. All their plans changed, when Travis noticed the mosaic.

"Wait.....I know that facial image." Said Travis. "It isn't covered with much dirt and sand. We could clear it completely in an hour or so."

A beam of sunlight was coming through a hole in a wall and lighting up a face on the mosaic. It looked almost deliberate, as if a deity was shouting 'look at this.' Drew recognised the image too and knew they couldn't ignore the mosaic.

"I know that face from some of Nick's books." Said Drew. "It's Baphomet, one of the gatekeepers of hell. Some believe he's also keeper of the balance. The Templars worshipped him and it cost them everything, including their lives."

"Éliphas Lévi knew Baphomet controlled the balance." Said James. "He was one of the few occultists of the nineteenth century, who wasn't a total fraud.....It seems we're giving an ancient mosaic a quick cleaning job."

They used feet and hands, to shove centuries of dirt out of the way. Anything was used that could do the job of a trowel or a shovel. Heavy, sweaty work in a temperature they'd have once thought was impossible to work in. They were acclimatising though, getting used to being hot and nearly always thirsty. It was still a relief when, after just over an hour, James called a halt to their efforts.

"That'll do.....We can see everything important." Said James. "You know what we do next.....Lots of pictures and notes.....Then we move on to the stairs."

Drew had Adie's camera and took a couple of dozen pictures. She didn't need telling the mosaic was beyond being simply wrong, it was impossible for its given age.

"A temple built before the Sumerians arrived." Said Drew. "Yet this likeness of Baphomet.....It's the later image of Baphomet as the Sabbatic Goat. A nice clear image, of a face not used for Baphomet, before the eighteen hundreds."

"That's impossible of course, but yes.....Today we can see the impossible with our own eyes." Said James.

"But how.....I'd say it was a trick.....But it isn't." Said Travis. "I don't understand how Louise's team didn't notice this."

"All archaeologists and students." Said Nick. "Now.....If they'd brought an occultist with them....."

"We make our notes and.....Move on." Said James.

There was a noise as they finished taking their pictures. It was as if an entire pack of wolves was growling at them. At one point, Drew thought they must be about to be attacked. As they put away cameras and note books, the growling stopped. It was interesting.....After seeing and hearing so many strange things. No one commented on the noise. The stairs were still there and did seem to be the source for another strange sound in a dry desert with just about zero humidity.....The sound of water slowly, but constantly....Dripping.

"I'm relieved in a way." Said James. "I did wonder if there really had been stairs. This thing we're chasing after, or it is chasing after us.....I'm sure it can make us see what isn't real."

"Yes, I too wondered if the stairs were an induced hallucination." Said Drew.

"No forcing anyone, no military gung-ho jargon." Said James. "If you don't want to go down there, you can wait up here. No time to ponder on it.....Who is going down there with me?"

"Can I have the gun?" Asked Drew.

There was laughter and when it ended, they were all on the way down the steps. It was hot on the stairs, which was normal for a desert in North Africa. The high humidity wasn't normal, especially when combined with the constant sound of dripping water. It was as if something was getting in the way of the light from their lamps. It looked as if a mist was surrounding them and stopping them seeing anything. At the bottom of the steps they realised.....

"This place is huge." Said James. "No wonder our lamps show so little."

"Not a natural cavern." Said Nick. "Must be the size of the Albert Hall in here.....All carved out by prehistoric man.....Using hand tools."

"Primitive hand tools at that." Added Travis. "Bone antlers probably and whatever sharp rocks they could find.....A great many flint tools have been found in Libya."

James moved and everyone followed. Following James had become a reflex, like writing notes and taking pictures. The chamber was huge, maybe even larger than the inside of the Albert Hall. So large that their lamps could only give an idea of various structures on the other side. High too, when Drew pointed her lamp upwards it showed a smooth grey ceiling, a long way above them.

"First.....We'll find that damned dripping water." Said James.

On the way to the sound and smell of water, they passed quite a few bones. Adult bones this time and, according to Travis, definitely human. Some were leg bones, which looked to have been gnawed clean of flesh. A few had been cracked open top get at the nutritious marrow. Travis had mentioned the marrow and Drew was happy to believe him. She really wasn't sure if Travis was a kind of genius, or just winged it a lot.

"This place looks nasty." Said James. "These remains though.....None of them are recent."

It took a few minutes to reach the pond, which was full of reddish algae. Humid near the pond, but the water was having a cooling effect. A large pond against a wall, with what looked like a kind of altar in front of it. The pool was overflowing in places, causing the algae to spread across the floor. Despite the overflow, it seemed amazing to Drew, that the pool was still there, still full of water after thousands of years.

“Do you think the water is safe to drink ?” Drew asked no one in particular.

“Not unless it was filtered, boiled and treated with sterilising tablets.” Said James. “Even then I’d want a toxin test on it.....To be sure.”

“Why didn’t Louise’s students find this place ?” Asked Drew.

“Easy.....You’re a nervous student in a weird temple.” Said Nick. “They never looked far inside the ruins. On the recording, Roger mentioned not wanting to enter the dark places.”

“Yes, sounds about right.” Said James. “Anyway.....You know the routine by now.”

“Lots of pictures and notes.” Said Drew. “Then we move on.....To whatever we find next.”

There were artefacts in the pond, probably lots of them hidden by the algae. A few metal objects protruded above the water. Some of them looked like gold, though no one suggested carrying them away. There was something about the pond full of offerings to an ancient God. Drew had a feeling they were being watched. It was as if the deity watched over the offerings from its faithful followers.

“There’s a gold oil lamp over here.....Must be worth a fortune.” Said Nick.

“Leave it for the trained archaeologists.” Said Travis. “We need to tell Louise about this place. Her university will send a team here.....Probably very, very quickly.”

“I wonder which God they offered their gold to.” Said Drew.

“Something so ancient.....We may have no record of its name.” Said Nick.

“I don’t think so.....Look at this.” Said Travis.

His lamp was aimed at a grubby part of the wall on the other side of the pond. Only there was more there than dirt and whatever algae and Mother Nature had covered the wall with.

“I see it.....Yes, quite clear once you look at it right.” Said Drew.

“It can’t be.....That’s impossible.” Said James.

“We’re going to have to get used, to living with the impossible.” Said Travis.

Would everything have been fine, if Travis hadn’t tried to get closer to the carving on the wall ?

There might have been no attack, if he hadn’t put his right foot into the water. Probably an accident, the carving had shocked them all. An offering pond and an altar from.....Tens of thousands of years ago. Yet on the wall was an image of Baphomet. Probably called by a different name, but the image was easy to see, once you ignored all the dirt. It was the nineteenth century version of Baphomet, the Sabbatic Goat image, so loved by occultists.

“It just.....We can’t be seeing this.” Said Travis.

“But we are.” Said Drew. “A new temple built over a truly ancient one. Not unknown, but.....Baphomet must have been pissed off.”

The next few minutes felt like an hour, with Drew feeling as though the world was in slow motion. It wasn’t until James told them all to run, that time became normal again. All explained by too much trauma and natural anxiety of course, though at the time.....Drew just reacted without trying to connect with what was happening. It began with a face coming out of the wall, a face more feral canine than human.

“Careful, Travis.” Yelled James. “To your right.....Looks like you’re upset something.”

No wonder they’d heard the growling of wolves, the creature coming out of the wall looked like everyone’s nightmare wolf would look. Ridiculously long teeth and sharp claws on its feet and paws.

It didn't need to growl to be terrifying, but it did. Even its fur was spikey and intimidating. Things slowed down, when James took the assault rifle from his shoulder and aimed it at the creature.

"Move, Travis.....I need a clear shot." Shouted James.

If only Travis had moved back out of the pond, rather than to his right. James fired several shots at the feral beast and there was no effect. He moved closer and fired on fully automatic. He stopped wasting ammunition, as it was obvious no amount of bullets were going to hurt the brute.

"Move you fool.....Get out of the pond, Travis." Shouted Nick.

There came that point, when Drew knew Travis wasn't going home with them. They had discussed the likelihood of death during conference calls. As far as Drew was aware, everyone had taken care of the legal side of a sudden and unexpected death. Her own mother would become the owner of her infamous flat in Clapham, complete with a millstone mortgage. To see Travis die though.....That made it all far too real.

"No.....No.....Shoot it James, kill the fucker." Shouted Drew.

The wolf like creature was probably a minion of some kind, something called upon to defend the pond and its altar. It bit out Travis's throat and used its claws to dig out both of his eyes. Part of Drew's terrified mind, knew the eyes were a symbolic thing, though she couldn't remember why. James emptied his assault rifle at the brute; Drew heard when it clicked on empty. The minion of an unknown deity, actually ate what was left of Travis's throat. When it looked up and growled, James had obviously made a decision.

"Follow me.....We're leaving !" Shouted James. "Run.....Follow me and run !"

That was when the world speeded up again for Drew. She'd been splashed with blood at some point, Travis's blood. Drew was running faster than she thought she could run, while following James up the stairs and out of the ruins, which Adie insisted they called a temple. Poor Adie, they'd need to watch her. She might go crazy for a while.

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Florence Glynn had felt watched at night. From sunset to sunrise, she'd felt something. Betsy said Nick and Drew called it the Presence which was a good name for it. Daylight hours were fine, but once it was dark.....There was a definite presence in the house. The strange thing was that despite seeing Karl killed in front of her, Florence didn't feel scared of whatever was watching her.

"As long as you're getting your eight hours a night." Said Betsy. "That's the important thing.....Too little sleep can be corrosive to the mind, or so I've heard."

Florence had heard sleep deprivation was sometimes used to treat schizophrenia. Not that she was going to mention it to Betsy. An explanation of the knowledge might be asked for. Not that Florence had ever been diagnosed with any serious mental illness. It had been one of her companions in the biker gang, during her period of rebelling against.....Just about everything.

"It doesn't worry me.....I sense that it's watching me, but won't hurt me." Said Florence.

Her food arrived on time and without too many substitutions. The gardens looked wonderful and the water in the indoor pool was always clean and just the right temperature. Add on a good looking hunk, or two, and the manor would have been a paradise. Even with being watched at night, Florence wasn't keen on being moved to somewhere like a cheap bed and breakfast, or a rent by the day motel.

"If you're happy here, I won't insist on shifting you to somewhere else." Said Betsy. "Anyway, you may be able to return home soon. The police are trying to link all the deaths together and if they succeed.....The soldier may be charged with everything."

"Can they link a dead neighbour of Den's, to the death of Stuart and Poula Goodford ?"

“Everything revolves around the two blocks of flats, in Islington and Clapham. I was sure the police would bring Denise into it more, but they now appear to accept that she’s not a killer. Sovi’s news item was the clincher, it links everything together, even events in Libya. Sovi offers no conclusions, but she doesn’t have to. A good journalist should inform and allow readers to add two and two together.....To get eight, or a dozen.”

Sovi’s story was everywhere. Florence had begun channel flipping on the TV, to avoid another update on the news item. A top London solicitor involved with his PA, complete with occult undertones. There had also been a lot about the deaths in Clapham.

“The story is everywhere, even on the crappy news channels.” Said Florence.

“Sovi is going to do very well out of this.” Said Betsy. “Not that I begrudge her a penny. Nick’s book will sell.....I’ve already had a staggering offer from a large publishing house.”

“How much ?” Asked Florence.

“Come back to work and you’ll see the numbers.” Said Betsy. “Have another week living like the lady of the manor.....Then I want you back in the office.”

Florence gave a loud stage sigh, but in reality.....She was looking forward to getting back to her own flat. A fleeting thought ran through her head and came to a halt for a while. In a way, the little nuisance had caused her current predicament.

“Is Suki alright ?” Asked Florence.

“Yes.....I’m sure she’s put on weight.”

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Denise Morgan had insisted she was quite capable of collecting a few things and putting them in a suitcase. Despite that, it was nice to have Marsha with her. Sovi had remained in the hotel to make a few calls, but it had been her who’d insisted.

“You’re not going on your own, Den.” Sovi had said. “The story is out and they’re probably stirring things up in Libya. The Presence will undoubtedly be aware of everything. For a while at least.....No one enters that block of flats on their own.”

Strange to hear her home talked about in that way, but a hell of a lot of strange things had happened there. Then there had been the deaths.....The police might have some poor squaddie in the cells for that, but Den knew he’d had nothing to do with it. Despite saying she wanted to move if she could afford to, there was something about her small flat in Islington. Despite all the trouble, and knowing her feelings were crazy, it still felt like home. Despite the story appearing in the major national papers and the BBC, there was just one reporter in front of the outside door. Well, it was that time of day when not much happened.

“Denise.....Denise Morgan ? Can I have a quick word with you ?” Asked the reporter.

When did an annoying reporter become a journalist ? Den had no idea, but Sovi had asked her not to talk to any reporters, journalists, or even people from the Beeb. She opened the door and they went inside. The reporter was persistent, even aiming questions at the closed door.

“Denise.....Is it true that Poula Goodford repeatedly threatened you ?”

Crap.....Where had that piece of nonsense come from ? Tempting to yell back, but Sovi had asked her not to talk to anyone but her, so she was going to do just that.

“I’d better grab my post.” Said Den. “With Mary away, it gets left lying around. Maybe we should have appreciated her a little.”

With a few letters jammed in a pocket, Den opened the door to her flat. There was a letterbox in her door, though it was normally rarely used. There was a small pile of handwritten notes on her doormat. Den quickly scanned a few of them.

“They got into the block.....They’re all from reporters wanting to talk to me.” Said Den.
“It’s well and truly begun.” Said Marsha. “Probably a good idea if you live at the hotel for a while.”
Her home felt different, as though whatever had been watching her, was no longer there. The feeling drove her to look in every room. The expensive looking wooden chair was still in her lounge, though it was no longer hovering against the ceiling.
“Look at this Marsha.....Something is different.....Something has gone.” Yelled Den.
The chair was broken into dozens of tiny pieces, which were scattered over her lounge carpet. A relief in a way, not to find the chair hanging from the ceiling. It was impossible to resist picking up one of the larger pieces.
“It feels.....Just like ordinary wood.” Said Den.
“Things might be different, but I feel a really bad vibe here.” Said Marsha. “Pack as much as you can.....I have a really bad feeling. There will be more deaths in the block, Den. I’m certain of it.”
Den packed three suitcases, enough of her possessions to avoid coming back for quite some time. After such a strong warning, it was impossible not to keep looking over her shoulder. The entry phone buzzing didn’t help her anxiety. It seemed there were a few reporters outside now, all of them keen to talk to her. Marsha grabbed two of her cases, while Den locked up her flat.
“Ignore the denizens of the press.” Said Marsha. “Trample them if you have to.....Straight to the car and we leave. Are you ready?”
“Yes.....Let’s get out of this place.”

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