

Quid Pro Quo

(Season three of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 25 – Chains To Bind Him

“Was that it ? Was his death going to be on the grubby metal floor of an old Fiat van ? Not that it really mattered, but it did seem a rather squalid way to end a life of close to eight hundred years.”

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“We tried to warn you” Said Walter. “Simon Atherton has been taken out of time by Huh. There are consequences for daring to meddle with time.”

“There are always consequences my dear.” Added Emily.

Laura had come to pick up the weapons of the fallen they'd chosen, before talking to Walter and Emily about something entirely different. She remembered them saying something about Simon angering someone, an entity who was best left alone. There had also been the worried sounding message from Patsy, saying she hadn't heard from Simon in just over twenty four hours. It was Simon though, a tough vampire nearly eight hundred years old. He wasn't a shy high school kid, who you worried about if they were ten minutes late getting home on the bus.

“The name sounds familiar and I should have asked you sooner, but things have been a bit hectic. Tell me then, who or what is this Huh ?” She asked.

“The God of time, eternity and infinity, he is one of the oldest of the great ancient Gods.” Said Walter.

“The Egyptians labelled him the God of a million years, because to them, a million years was eternity.” Said Emily.

For about the tenth time in as many days, Laura wished she'd listened more to Magda when they'd been travelling together, or learned a little more ancient Egyptian history while at school. The God Huh was just a name to her, a name only vaguely remembered.

“So, you're saying Simon has seriously pissed off Huh ?” She asked.

“He has and Huh has removed him from time, we both felt it.” Said Emily. “He'll put Simon back in time when he's ready, though there's no telling where he might end up.”

“I'm confused.....Is Simon in danger or not ?” Asked Laura.

“These sorts of things are so rare Laura.” Said Walter. “There is a chance Simon will be removed forever and we'll all gradually forget about him.”

“Is that likely ?”

“No.....Huh is more likely to place Simon somewhere he can help to repair any damage he may have caused.”

Laura gave it a few moments thought and decided the only way to deal with a major problem while already dealing with a major problem, was to delegate.

“So Simon isn't in imminent danger of death ?” She asked.

“Probably not.” Said Walter.

“Though we can't guarantee that.” Added Emily.

They were back to the double act, which Laura found oddly comforting.

“Alright, you can live here in my apartment in the Silver Dawn base, but I will expect loyalty from you. Having somewhere to watch late night TV for eternity does come with a price.”

"We'd never betray your trust, we know what you'd do." Said Walter.

"Being ghosts isn't ideal, but it's better than being thrown into the abyss." Added Emily.

"I'm glad we understand one another." Said Laura. "I want the pair of you to dig around and ask whoever it is you usually ask for information. I will want to know everything Simon is supposed to have done and what the God Huh intends to do about it....Understood?"

"Yes Laura." Said Walter.

"We won't let you down." Said Emily.

"Now.....No lies....I'm sure you must have heard Horus wants me to kill Yosef Khatib?"

"We were aware of that." Said Walter.

"A very dangerous person Laura, you will need to be careful."

"Thank you Emily, I will try to be very careful. I have a few ideas on how to get the job done. I was thinking about the chains Akiva used to bind you."

"They'd never hold Khatib." Said Walter.

"I know, I need a stronger set made and Akiva is a bit reluctant to help me with a name. He told me some nonsense about them being made by dwarves in their caves."

"He stole them." Said Emily. "He doesn't know who made them, but we know. Not that we'd ever tell Akiva, he'd get more made to use on us."

Laura liked Akiva, but the story about him stealing the chains and then claiming to have commissioned their manufacture, had a ring of truth to it.

"I appreciate that loyalty works both ways." Said Laura. "I'd never dream of chaining up either of you.....You have my word."

"She needs to see the hermit." Said Emily.

"Yes....He's still in Prague I believe." Said Walter.

A hermit who lived in Prague made Laura think of Akiva and his stories about dwarves hard at work in their caverns deep underground. Her mind was working overtime, but she had run into some strange creatures recently, few of whom were totally human.

"What sort of creature is this hermit?" She asked.

"A man and not that old." Said Walter. "Some have the knack, he seemed to have been born with it. Enchanting metals can't be taught, or so it seems."

"Though he has read a lot of the sacred books." Said Emily.

"Oh yes dear, he has studied a lot of arcane literature.....You'll need to get to Prague Laura. I can give you an address and a few directions for once you're there." Said Walter.

"Be careful Laura, the hermit is very religious, an old school catholic who is one of the rare humans who can recognise vampires. He's certain to have a few prejudices against your kind."

"Oh, I'm sure he has Emily." She said

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Simon could have dumped the burglar's dead body anywhere. There was no connection to him and no DNA evidence to worry about. He hadn't even fed on the dead man, so there weren't even puncture marks to be concerned about. Simon thought that burglary had to be a high risk occupation anyway. One day you were almost certain to get a bad throw of the dice and run into a large angry guy with a baseball bat. Old habits and routines die hard though and instead of dumping the body in a dumpster, Simon had driven right out to Bostall Woods in South East London. Not far from the Thamesmead estate, he'd buried a couple of people there in the seventies. Close enough to a few main roads with their yellow street light, to mean he could dig a shallow grave without needing a lamp. A long drive to dispose of a burglar in a ridiculously over the top way.

"I probably need the exercise." He muttered.

After burying George he had a definite thing for burying his kills. He'd gone through a similar phase about a hundred years before. Trees lived long and usually undisturbed lives. Get just the right spot and the burglar might well lie undisturbed for a century or more, allowing for over enthusiastic dogs of course. Simon had finished digging the hole, which was about four feet deep. He'd already searched the pockets, so the burglar went into the hole fully dressed.

"Farewell cutpurse and scoundrel....You won't be missed."

He'd used the same phrase when burying a highwayman near St Albans two hundred years before and quite liked the sound of it. Filling a grave was easier than digging it, though there was all the treading down to firm up the ground and then covering it with dead leaves. By the time Simon returned to his van, he actually felt quite tired, a rare thing for a vampire his age. It would have been nice to sleep in the back of the van, until he remembered...

"Crap.....Anthony has a team brief in the morning."

The spade went onto the metal clips designed to hold it and Simon began to feel really tired, the sort of tiredness that was well on the way to becoming deep fatigue. He cursed Anthony a few times and really intended to be there for the team brief at nine thirty. Maybe not exactly bright eyed and bushy tailed, but he was determined to be there.

"Maybe just close my eyes for a minute." He muttered.

Simon ended up on his back, too tired to get up. Strangely he couldn't sleep, though a curtain seemed to have been pulled over his eyes. Something wasn't right, though he didn't have the strength to try and fight it. He thought about trying to activate the snake under the skin of his left arm, but found he'd forgotten the words. Was that it ? Was his death going to be on the grubby metal floor of an old Fiat van ? Not that it really mattered, but it did seem a rather squalid way to end a life of close to eight hundred years.

"Now I'll never know all of the great secret." He mumbled.

There was no gradual change. One moment he was in the back of his grubby old van and the next he was lying on a polished marble floor. Still on his own with just the glow of a lamp somewhere for light. He wasn't dreaming he could feel the hard floor against his back and....It all felt very real. He tried to turn onto his side and succeeded, though the waves of nausea made it only a partial victory. "Hello.....Is anyone there ?" He called out.

No answer, but he could at least see the old oil lamp and what was probably the doorway. Gradually his strength began to return and the deep fatigue began to go away. It probably took him close to an hour to get up on his feet and by then, he no longer cared about Anthony and his team brief. What he'd thought to be a door was an area of different coloured stone. It didn't take him long to look around the room and as far as he could tell, there was no door. He appeared to be trapped in a marble lined room with no means of getting out.

"I bet Laura has something to do with this." He mumbled.

"You have to listen to her.....And be polite."

Words in Italian, it was a miracle his mind still understood them. The room had been empty, he'd walked right round it. Now there was a tiny table, the sort put outside bistros. Two chairs, one either side, with an oil lamp in the centre. Sitting in one chair was a man he still recognised, even if he hadn't seen him for....It was a hell of a long time. Automatically Simon gave a slight bow.

"Brother Alberti.....That can't be you." Simon said, in Italian.

"You need to listen my boy, can you do that ? For once in your life listen and do as you're told."

"Of course I will....What would you have me do ?" Asked Simon.

“To her, you need to listen to her !!”

“Who Brother Alberti ? Who should I listen ?”

“Oh dear, you were my best pupil and my worst, all mixed into one. This is your last chance to know it all.....Festina Lente.”

Brother Alberti vanished and the sound of stone grinding against stone made him turn. It appeared the doorway was a doorway after all. Like a huge stone plug, a section of the wall was pulled back, to allow access to somewhere else. A woman dressed in long flowing blue robes entered and sat at the table. Simon wasn't surprised when a carafe of wine appeared on the table, along with two glasses. She used her hand to beckon him over, before filling both glasses. Simon did as he was told and sat down.

“Where am I ?” He asked.

“You are nowhere Simon. You have been removed from time and reality and brought to this place, which only exists because the Great God Huh wishes it to exist.”

He guessed she'd give him another weird reply, but he had to ask.

“Who are you ?”

“I am merely a servant of the Great Huh, my name is unimportant.”

Simon decided to take a sip of the wine, which was excellent. He doubted if an entire crate of the stuff would help the day make any more sense, but he drank half the glass anyway.

“Sorry.....All this must be very confusing.” She said.

“It's that mirror isn't it ?” He asked. “Seeing Brother Alberti again and being pulled out of time. I'm guessing going through the mirror was a pretty stupid idea.”

The servant of Huh drank quite a bit of her wine. She'd probably had better days too.

“You interacted with yourself in a different period of time.” She said. “That had the potential to be catastrophic. Moving through entity can help, though few have mastered that skill.”

“Moving through entity ?” He asked.

“I will indulge your curiosity this time, though then we must discuss.....What you would probably describe as, how much shit you're actually in.”

“You're the God Huh aren't you ?” Simon asked. “Talking through her body....But the way you're talking. It's you.....Isn't it ?”

“I can see why Alberti thought you were the one....Yes, my acolytes have their own free will and existence, yet I can talk through their mouths. As for moving through entity.....Have you ever wondered why you are you and not viewing the world through the eyes of.....Say, the man next door ?”

“I can't say I ever have, no.” Said Simon.

“That is because you accept the normality of the world you were born in. Time is linear and entity is fixed. You will die as Simon Atherton, live your life as Simon Atherton and when you die, you'll die as Simon Atherton. Many of the commonly believed problems with time travel simply don't exist if you can move through entity.....My dear Simon, whether you believe it or not, I'm about to send you on a unique adventure.”

“Alright.....How much shit am I in ?”

“Let me fill your glass, then I'll tell you what I intend to do with you. First you must accept that reality can be quite fluid.....”

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The twentieth gate was different to any they'd passed through before, which didn't really surprise Liz at all.

"You're sure this it?" Asked Clara. "We were all fooled by a false gate once before."

"We're at the gate, I can feel it.....It's just that my fingers won't activate it." Said Liz.

For about the tenth time Liz allowed her fingers to take on their true form, as the tentacle fingers of the Unnamed One. Every time for the last nineteen gateways, it had worked. No matter what she did, the gate refused to activate. It looked different too, short, squat and made out of blocks of red stone.

"Ahh....Now I'm looking at it closer.....There are grooves." Said Liz.

"The longer we stand here, the more likely we are to get attacked." Said Mabina.

Liz was ignoring Mabina, there had already been far too many sarcastic comments. She knelt down and looked into a hole in the side of the gateway, a hole with grooves that weren't symmetrical. The shape of the hole was suggestive of a certain shape.....

"I get it.....Yes.....Do you still have the diamond Clara?"

"I knew it was too good to be true. You want to do something dreadful to it, I can feel it."

"It was given to you deliberately, or I think it was." Said Liz. "You have a large diamond and the gate has a diamond shaped hole. Your diamond is likely to be a key."

"Say goodbye to it Clara." Said Mabina. "The gate is sure to melt it, or swallow the damn thing."

"Ignore her, she's having a bad day." Said Liz.

It was good of Clara to hand over the priceless gem, especially after Mabina's comment. Liz pushed it into the hole and the gateway came to life. As for the diamond.....It vanished completely.

"Oh dear." Said Liz.

"It's been destroyed, hasn't it?" Asked Clara.

"It would appear so.....Sorry."

"Oh well, easy come, easy go." Said Clara. "Looking on the bright side, the curse will probably kill us all anyway."

"Give me a moment to check it over." Said Liz.

"Another moment!" Snapped Mabina.

There were days when Mabina was downright impossible and Liz had learned to, as far as possible, ignore her on those days.

"Can I help?" Asked Clara.

"No..... I'll need to change more into...That thing. Don't worry, most of me will still be human."

Extra power and senses came with the change, so it was well worth the risk. Liz allowed her arms, legs and much of her torso to become that dreadful creature, the Unnamed One. Every time was easier, as if her body desperately wanted to become the creature of darkness and remain in that form. She was a mass of writhing tentacles when she wrapped herself around the active twentieth gate to the underworld. After a few minutes came the hard work of forcing the creature out, so she could become fully human again. The change left her with a blinding headache and an all over body ache.

"Nothing, Thoth was either lying.....Or the gate changed when this world changed a little." She said.

"So the curse has gone?" Asked Mabina.

"Old Gods can be tricky Mabina.....But I'm confident enough to go first through the gate, as I always do."

"Send the hounds through first Liz." Said Clara.

"They lack the intelligence to return, so that would prove nothing. It has to be me."

Everything felt right, but Gods were Gods and only a fool underestimated them. Liz remembered Thoth's threat about putrefaction of limbs, boils in painful places and hideous malformations, as she

stepped into and through the gateway. No part of her hurting, rotting or becoming grotesque was such a nice surprise, that it stopped her noticing the creatures gathered on the road of the pharaohs. Quickly the others were behind her, making lots of excited comments about not appearing to be cursed with anything of biblical nastiness.

“And the lights are on for this part of the road.” Said Clara. “How far to the final gate Liz?”

“Look Clara.....You must be able to see them.” Said Liz.

Not that far away, but far enough for them to be lost among the glare of the lights off the marble cobbles. A huge number of grey skinned creatures, all slightly smaller than a grown human. Arms, legs and a head on top, the usual shape for anything that was, or had once been human. The tails made Liz think they hadn't always been human.

“I see them Liz.....The hounds aren't growling at them.”

“They all seem to be carrying weapons.” Said Mabina. “Though they don't look threatening.”

Liz didn't know what to make of the creatures, until they put down their swords and spears to give her a low bow. The hounds seemed to think they were alright and she didn't think an enemy was likely to bow to her. There were a lot of them, maybe as many as two or three hundred. The one who spoke to her looked no different to the others, though he spoke with a certain gravitas. Words in a language she couldn't remember hearing before, yet she understood him. One name he repeated a few times surprised her.

“Jack.....Did you say Jack was here?”

The creature with grey skin assured her it was the same Jack that she knew and he was in the company of a powerful well known Seer, or at least well known to them. Liz felt her head was spinning, even before Clara and Mabina began a deluge of questions.

“Did you mention Jack?” Asked Clara. “Is that our Jack, Gwen's boy?”

“It is, though I'm as surprised as you.” Said Liz. “He's here with a Seer who must be Wiremi.”

“Why, what is he here for?” Asked Mabina.

“It appears he's here to help deal with me, when I become.....That thing! They won't tell me details because if I know, the Unnamed One will also know.”

“Who are these people with tails?” Asked Clara.

Liz couldn't think of anyone apart from Clara who'd have phrased the question in quite that way.

“They're my minions and my memory of them has returned, a little. Far more ferocious than they look and tough fighters. They have pledged themselves to serve me for as long as they live.”

“Useful, we'll be able to leave them on watch and get a good night's sleep at last.” Said Mabina.

“No more sleeping in the caverns and tunnels of the underworld.” Said Liz. “We're less than ten miles from the final gate.”

“Oh, that close.....I know I should be happy, but after all this time.....” Said Clara.

“I know, these tunnels and the battles in them have become our life.” Said Mabina.

“A trip out to John Lewis will feel so tame now.” Said Liz. “Come on, the sooner we get this over with the sooner we'll be back home.”

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Ronnie Neophytou had never believed in the dos and don'ts of dating. The whole business of a good long snog after the first date, advancing to a grope and a bit of fingering on the second, with a good hard shag on the third. To her if it felt right she'd happily sleep with a guy on the first date. With Noah it had felt really right and they'd parked up for sex in his car on the way back from the restaurant. A Greek restaurant of course, she'd insisted on that.

They were now at the stage where they were like two sexual Ferraris, at it most of the night and still wanting more. Ronnie knew she was infatuated and taking it all too fast, but she didn't care. Noah had as good as moved in to her place, he already had his section of her wardrobe and a drawer of his own for socks and boxer shorts. They tended to live in her flat of course, because it was ten times cleaner than Noah's.

"There's someone giving my car a look over Ronnie." Said Noah. "Do you recognise him ? I don't want to go out and threaten one of your neighbours."

She had a second floor flat in a purpose built block. Second floor front with no lift, a real pain if she needed anything delivered. It was the best she'd been able to afford to buy though and there was off road parking. She looked out of the window and saw Anthony peering into Noah's Volvo.

"Oh Crap, it's Anthony." She said. "My old boss, I worked for him for years."

"When you were selling phone system."

"Yes, and lots of other things.....I'd better go down and talk to him."

"Do you want me to come ?"

Did she ? It needed a few seconds of thought. Noah might hear a few things that Simon would probably consider private, though nothing earth shattering. On the other hand, Anthony was a big guy with a reputation for turning nasty if he didn't get his own way. That might be a problem as she never had called him back with news about Simon, because there was none. No one knew where he was.

"Yeah, good idea." She said.

Anthony still hadn't rung her bell, by the time they'd put on their shoes and coats to keep out the biting wind. He was still looking through the windows of Noah's car.

"I was going to call you Anthony." She said. "No one knows anything.....Though I'm sure Simon is alright, probably shacked up with his bit on the side until Clara gets back."

Anthony, he always insisted on being called Anthony. Ronnie had heard a few stories about him sacking sales staff who dared to call him Tony.

"Is this his new car then ? Is he up there with you ?" Yelled Anthony.

"No, the Volvo is mine." Said Noah.

It was if Anthony had seen her boyfriend for the first time. Poor Anthony, he looked totally lost and confused. Ronnie felt torn between inviting him up for a cup of tea and wanting him to get the fuck out of her life forever.

"It's worse than being married." Said Anthony. "Being partners in a business I mean. Some things for the bank need both of us to sign. Some of the clients are already asking where he is."

"I haven't seen him lately Anthony, you have my word."

"How about his bit on the side, do you have her number ? I need to find him Ronnie, do you know a number for Laura ? The last one I had doesn't work anymore."

Ronnie was really glad Noah was stood close to her.

"No Anthony, I can't give you people's numbers. Simon will be back soon, I'm sure of it. He isn't the sort to simply vanish."

"Did you get cheque alright.....The one for your commission ?"

"Yes, thank you."

"And you still won't give me those numbers ?"

"No I won't."

Anthony must have left his car in the main road. She watched him stomp off and realised she'd never been seriously scared of her old boss until then.

“That guy is seriously losing it.....You should stay at my place for a while.” Said Noah.

“Only if you change the bed sheets and clean all the hair out of the drain in the shower.”

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Simon stood on the same small bridge he'd used regularly over seven hundred and fifty years before. The bridge over the narrow river hadn't been anything that special, no conservation group would have got hot and bothered about it. Simon had once tried to find it on a map during the early part of the twentieth century and it was no longer there. The river itself had become wider, with a new road bridge built further upstream. Simon Atherton, or Piero Rossi, or whatever the hell he was now, accepted for a fact that he was once again stood on the bridge just outside Florence, during the reign of the Medici. It was night and something about the window in the house he shared with Giovanni and the strange girl child Niña, held his attention. The acolyte of Huh had told him what was about to happen.

“Brother Alberti should never have left those rooms to jog your memory like that Simon. He meant well, but the consequences.....Clara has been told of course, we owed you that. As for Patsy.....”

“Will I ever see her again ?” He'd asked.

“Of course you will. You'll meet her on that Piccadilly Line train in the early part of the twenty first century. For now you will have to make do with a wave and a smile.”

He'd been told that major events were fixed, protected by the God Huh and his minions. Minor everyday events would be changed though, the number of variables was too massive for it to be otherwise. Simon was just glad that Patsy Smart had been considered an important part of his life, important enough for their meeting to be a fixed point in time. He'd never doubted seeing Clara again, their bond was too strong. So many years sharing their lives and a bed, that their timelines had to be too entwined to break apart. Not that Simon understood half he'd been told by the acolyte of Huh. A face came to the window, a face he knew was going to appear. Simon smiled and for some reason put his finger to his lips. Not to stop her talking, he couldn't have heard her anyway. He meant that words were often unimportant. When Patsy turned away, her carried on over the bridge.

“There will be a potential for catastrophe until there is only one of you.” He'd been told.

Simon was still wearing the scruffy jeans and jacket he'd put on to dig a shallow grave, yet no one in the small town square seemed to be able to see him. It was late and most people would be safely indoors, but he'd walked right in front of one young couple, who'd ignored him completely.

“You'll be moved through entity Simon and you will still be Simon. Actually you'll be both Piero and Simon.....Always remember that reality behaves more like a fluid than a solid. When anyone calls you Piero, you will hear them calling for Simon.”

Daniel had once told him all vampires were a gestalt form of living creature, though Simon had needed to look the word up on Google. A being who was more than the sum if his parts. That description suited vampires and it also suited the Simon-Piero person he was about to become. Simon opened the door to the house, it was never bolted until the last person went to bed, usually Niña. A house where two Medici assassins lived, an open secret in the area. No one was likely to try and burgle their home.

“Giovanni, please keep still.” Said Niña.

He heard her voice as he went up the stairs and into their lounge. Simon had been right, he was as yet invisible to that timelines. He walked between Giovanni and Niña, without being seen by either. The real danger appeared to be when he was stood in the same room as his Piero timeline, or so he'd been told, quite a few times.

“No talking Simon, no interaction of any kind, no matter what happens. The God Huh will do what needs to be done.”

Simon walked along the hallway and into the room that had been his bedroom for over three decades during the thirteenth century. Lying on the bed with a bottle of wine on the floor....Was him. Or at least him as he had been all that time ago. The room had an unpleasant smell of unwashed clothing and unwashed Piero. As his earlier self picked up the bottle of wine, there was definite eye contact.

“Dear God.....What work of the devil is this ?” Asked Piero.

Simon knew the moment wasn't in his memory, he'd have remembered such an obviously traumatic event, even after drinking a lot of wine. It had to be the dangerous part, where Huh merged the two timelines. He certainly wasn't going to reply to the scared looking man on the bed, even after Piero had picked up a sword.

“You don't know who you're dealing with.” Said Piero.

Had he really come out with pompous words like that ? If he'd learned nothing else in the next seven hundred and fifty years, he had at least become a lot less pompous, or at least he hoped he had.

“Stand quite still Simon Atherton.”

He heard her voice in his head, the acolyte Huh had used as a vehicle for his words and thoughts. Simon did as he was told, he'd begun to realise that could sometimes be the best option. Piero seemed to be frozen, with his sword drawn back as if to strike. The bedroom became dark and indistinct for several minutes, until.....

“Crap....I stink.” He muttered.

He was lying on the bed, his sword arm held at an angle that was beginning to hurt. There was no shock. Simon had been expecting to absorb the Piero timeline in some way. That his first thought was to leap naked into the river... That did surprise him. It seemed a century or so of decent hygiene had left its mark. He got up and walked into the lounge area.

“Simon.....Giovanni has fallen asleep and I can't move him.” Said Niña.

His friend had obviously passed out from the drink, not a rare thing for either of them. Actually that level of intoxication was quite an achievement for a vampire, their body handled booze better than that of a normal human. Simon helped her shove him into a more dignified pose so she could finish her pen and ink drawing. Niña was the person in his life who probably knew him the best and she hadn't noticed anything different.

“Will you sit for me later ?” She asked.

“Yes, but after I've swum naked in the river.....I'm filthy.”

“I did wash some of your things.....You have clean clothes in the hall cupboard.”

“Thank you.....I've been so busy, it seems days since I changed.” He said.

“How did things go in Bologna ?”

“Fine.....I'm here aren't I ?”

“Go on, enjoy your soak in a freezing cold river. I'll make something to eat.”

Had they really always been that domesticated ? He now had all the memories of Simon Atherton, right up the day he buried the burglar. He also had all the memories of the young Piero Rossi. All his memories from both lives felt fresh, they felt new. Some conflicted with what he'd imagined about parts of his life. He put it down to wishful thinking and a little guilt, doing a touch of remodelling on most people's memories. As he left the house he didn't see a living soul on his walk to the river.

“The first change I intend to make is stopping Niña from dying of the flux.” He muttered.

Simon wasn't proud of the grubby clothing he left on the riverbank, or the boots with a hole in the left one. He had money and he knew the right traders, it was just that...What was it?...Actually now he thought about it, why was he a bum? A relatively wealthy bum for the period, which made it worse.

"I wasn't happy being what I am, not then. I believed too much of what Giovanni told me and I felt ashamed of being a creature of the dark, a vampire." He muttered. "That is going change, from this moment."

No soap, though just rubbing his body with his hands, coupled with the fast flowing water, made him feel cleaner. His hair felt disgusting, though he was sure that even in the thirteen century, there must have been some sort of shampoo. What could he do differently?

"How far can I push my luck?" He mumbled.

There had been no instructions, just that Huh, one of the greatest of the Ancient Gods, would protect the big moments, the cusps to take his life along different paths. A God watching over him and he was young again, with the clear memories of a life full of experience.

"Oh Juliana, this time we're going to be really good friends."

The daughter of a nobleman, Juliana had seemed cold, aloof and quite hostile towards him. It was only years later that Simon had learned she'd just been trying to cover her desire for him. He put his head right under the water, choking up a mouthful of water as he rose.

"I hereby re-baptise myself to the darkness." He said. "I will look for what Brother Alberti wanted me to find, I will dedicate my life to discovering the great secret. But...I will also have a lot of fun."

Simon knew he had at least another millennium of life and the memory of clues and ideas about where to look. There had been two occasions when he'd changed, he realised that now. Those were where he'd start to look.

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