

Festina Lente

(Season four of London's Night Stalkers)

Chapter 4 – The Flux

“Most betrayed partners had ways of getting revenge on the other woman. Clara was a vampire with the occasional anger management problem. Patsy wasn't scared of Clara, but there had been times when sleeping with Simon, had felt like an extreme sport.”

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~ A story told by an Arab teller of tales, a very long time ago ~

Our current Gods are nebulous beings, almost never seen or heard. They are rarely seen, even by the most faithful of their flock. That hasn't always been the case. Once it was considered rare, but not unknown, for demons and Jinns to be seen in the street. Occasionally someone would claim to have seen a God in the marketplace. Of course, those were far more enlightened times than ours.... The merchant didn't live in Baghdad, he was just there visiting a relative. One of his mother's large number of sisters was unwell and a visit was almost obligatory. Her house had smelled of incense and the medicines she was taking. It had been a relief to get out of the house and once out in the fresh air, he was in no hurry to return. As if by chance he found himself in the marketplace. While looking for a gift for his mother's sister, he saw Death leaning against a wall.

Strange enough to see Death in the marketplace, but the God gave him the strangest of looks. A look of hatred, or maybe not. It might have been nothing, but the merchant decided then and there, to return home to Samarra. He told his servants to pack his things and told the truth to his mother's favourite sister.

“I saw Death in the marketplace. The look he gave me....I think he may be about to claim me.”

Once his things were packed, he began the long journey home to Samarra. The weather was unkind and his camels more troublesome than usual. It took him three days to reach home, but at least he'd put a good distance between himself and Death. A long hot bath, clean clothes and he was quickly back to feeling his old self. For all he knew, Death might well have been looking at someone else in the crowded market. That was it, his mother's sister being unwell, had placed a dark cloud over his thoughts.

It was a habit of his to walk around his garden just before dusk. The merchant loved the smells of the plants in his garden. It was his favourite place to be in the entire world. There was just one problem, Death was there. Death smiled and held his arm. The grip on his arm wasn't painful, but there was no escaping it.

“I saw you in Baghdad.” Said the merchant. “You looked at me so strangely.”

“I was surprised.” Said Death. “I knew we had an appointment three days later, in Samarra.”

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~ The home of Niccolò Machiavelli – Florence in the 15th Century ~

Simon's second meeting with Machiavelli and he still hadn't worked out why he might be useful to his search for the great prize. Niccolò had asked him about his life as a vampire. How he'd been turned and by who. He seemed especially interested in all the false and generally misleading nonsense, he'd been told by Giovanni. Nearly all of their first meeting had been like a Q&A session on the pros and cons of being a vampire. For a dreadful moment, Simon thought Niccolò might ask

him to turn him, right then and there. No, it seemed his questions were driven by the man's huge intellect, mixed with an insatiable curiosity.

"Think about it Simon, I might never meet another vampire. I predict I'll never meet another who has lived in the twenty first century. The changes you must have seen....."

There had been brief talk about the knowledge Niccolò could give him, but it had all been hints and vague promises. Simon had arrived back in his new house, with no more knowledge than when Huh's minions had carried him away. Machiavelli had mentioned an invaluable gift he had for Simon; one he didn't quite understand. Again, there was a lot of hinting and promising, but he'd never received the gift.

Several hours after he'd arrived in Niccolò's home, the minions came for him. Simon had been deposited back in the room Niña used as an art studio. From the angle of the sun through her window, he seemed to have been brought back to the exact same moment when he'd left.

Now on his second trip to see Niccolò and Simon was once again, watching the great man write at his work desk. Simon was determined that their relationship had to change. He wasn't there to amuse or inform Machiavelli. Simon needed information and the promised gift, if it really existed.

"Ahh, my dear Simon, you've returned." Said Niccolò. "I'm told this will be our last meeting, we'll never see one another again. My fault really, I'm far too curious."

Simon didn't know whether to be happy or sad. Niccolò was an interesting man, in other circumstances they might have been friends. It was the two hundred years between their lives though and the potential damage to the timelines. Obviously Huh thought the danger outweighed the potential benefits of their friendship.

"Not unexpected, but I didn't see any harm in telling you about vampire lore, what I know of it." Said Simon.

"No, nothing to do with our conversation, though I will admit I was tempted to ask you about becoming one of your kind. My curiosity was in finding out the hour and date of my death. I have a great gift for you, though I don't fully understand its purpose. I will give you the gift today, though I advise using it seldom and only when the need is great. I know the date and place of my death, which will be in my beloved Florence. Fifty eight seems such a young age to die."

Poor Niccolò, Simon felt sorry for him. The normally smiling face looked beyond sadness. It was as if all hope had been drained from the philosopher.

"I've known many who've lived shorter lives." Said Simon.

"Knowing has brought the knowledge that knowing the hours of one's death, makes life intolerable. I work out the days I have left, every morning. It's a very short number of days Simon. Even knowing there is something beyond this life doesn't help. Use the book carefully Simon, it contains knowledge no man should know. I suspect a vampire may do better than I, but still....Look at it only when there is no other option. It's in the library, locked away from prying eyes, even mine."

The windows in Machiavelli's library were curtained with thin yellow curtains, probably to stop the summer sun from damaging the books. There was a large solid looking cabinet, which Niccolò opened with a key on a chain around his neck. The heavy book he took from the cabinet seemed to glow for a few seconds, before looking like any other, large leather-bound book. It could have been a lectern bible from a church, but the obvious fear with which Niccolò handled it; made Simon move back a little.

"If I believed in such things, I'd say this book is cursed." Said Niccolò. "Come, we'll take it over to the table by the window. Then we shall see, what it wishes you to see."

Machiavelli opened a curtain just enough to give sufficient light to see the book. The philosopher seemed scared to open the book, before appearing to open it at random.

“Open this cursed tome wherever you like, it will always show you what it chooses.” Said Niccolò. “I once thought the angels of time had intended me to have it. Now I realise I was merely keeping it safe for you. Go on Simon, see what the book has for you.”

At first the language was unreadable, just a pile of dashes and lines. Slowly Simon realised he knew the story; he'd once read a copy as part of his education as Piero. A very old tale that seemed to originate in Mesopotamia, at least three thousand years ago, maybe even longer. A simple tale about a merchant seeing death in the marketplace. Often used as a way of saying it was impossible to avoid your fate, though there were many other interpretations. The book closed itself after he'd read the story.

“The book is yours now Simon, keep it safe.”

“I will, though I don't understand why it showed me that old campfire tale.”

“I did say I had some information for you, Simon.” Said Niccolò. “Plus, I will give you a little advice, which you're free to ignore if you choose. How is your waif, Simon ? Is Niña in good health ?”

Now her health had been mentioned, Simon remembered that Niña had been coughing quite a lot lately. She did seem to pick up every cold and chill in the town, so he hadn't been concerned.

“She's had a cough recently, probably just a summer illness.” Said Simon.

“That accursed book showed it to me Simon, I saw her death. It's the Flux and your Niña will die of it in ten days' time.”

“But there is no Flux in Prato.....Oh, I see now. There is no escaping fate, even by changing time. No matter what I do, poor Niña's fate is to die of that dreadful disease.” Said Simon.

Niccolò Machiavelli held his arm for a moment, though Simon's mind was full of the girl dying, again. Later he was to remember that moment and wish that he'd had more than just two meetings with the philosopher. It was obvious though, that Niccolò wanted to become a vampire and Simon might well have agreed to turn him. The great Niccolò Machiavelli abjures the light and enters the shadows....No, that could never be allowed to happen. Machiavelli put the book into a thick cloth bag and handed it to him.

“Now the advice Simon, then it's farewell. There are few people who can beat fate, but I believe you're one of them. You've been forewarned and you know how to save the girl. Don't ask others, you know what to do. Be brave Simon, be confident....You can save Niña.”

“I don't know how to save her life.” Said Simon.

“Yes you do, the answer is obvious. You can change her fate. The girl is important, she has to live. Ignore anyone and everyone who might offer alternatives, you know what you have to do.”

Simon thought he knew what Niccolò was suggesting, but on one so young....Such a thing was supposedly one of the big taboos, up there with despoiling holy ground. He might well cause a nasty death for himself and Niña. The minions of Huh returned and the library began to fill with a light mist.

“Simon, do they still like my books in the twenty first century ?”

“Yes, you're still famous.”

“Farewell Simon.”

The mist began to swirl and quite quickly, Simon was back in his house in Prato. He was once again in Niña's studio, watching her finish off a drawing of Juliana. Maybe he was now more conscious of it, but her cough sounded worse than the day before. He put the book in its cloth bag, on the chair next to her.

"I know I can trust you not to open the bag, or read the book it contains." He said.

"Of course, you can."

"Hide it for me Niña. Hide it somewhere in the house where only you can find it. One day I will ask you for it, but it might be a long time from now."

It wasn't much in the way of challenging fate, but it was a start. The book was essential to his search and if the girl died..... He could see several ways around the problem, including taking the house apart. It was a start though, a shot across the bows of fate.

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~ **The home of Mabina Gladitch – Chelsea, present day London** ~

"Let me get this right." Said Mabina. "You want us to enter the dreamworld and watch a lot of spaced-out Gods. Guys who seem to have Hakuna Matata down to an art form."

Liz Grant had gone to see Mabina on her own, she'd already had problems getting Brendan to take it seriously. She could see his point. If the other Gods, the active ones, weren't worried about the Wanderers, what was the problem? In the end Brendan had trusted her feelings about it, but she wasn't sleeping with Mabina. They had trudged through the underworld together though, from one end to the other. That had to mean something.

"They still have their Godly powers." Said Liz. "I just know this needs investigating, though I can't explain why. It's just a feeling, but a very strong feeling."

"I'm not fighting you on this." Said Mabina. "The organised behaviour they're now doing, is following one another. Is that right?"

"Up to eight have been seen, moving together." Said Liz. "The minions of the underworld are quite concerned. The wanderers are moving around some of the oldest shrines and temples on the planet."

"What has Laura had to say about this?" Asked Mabina. "She does seem to have the ear of Horus and a few of the other Ancient Gods."

"She has her own problems with Simon leaving. I believe Clara has been behaving out of character. Laura has her life with Tim as well. I will ask her to contact the Gods if things look serious, but for now. I don't want to give her something else to worry about."

Mabina could be difficult to read. The way she looked up at the ceiling, as she thought things through, wasn't encouraging. For one moment, Liz thought Mabina might refuse to help.

"Firstly, I can see why you're concerned." Said Mabina. "As you say, Gods are Gods, even zoned out ones. It would be wrong to assume the Wanderers are harmless. Secondly, visiting the ancient shrines as a group...That could be some kind of recharging activity. I will help you. So, what do we do?"

Liz felt ridiculously happy, that Mabina seemed to grasp the risks. Time to let her know the risks might be to her own life and limb.

"We do it together, always." Said Liz. "We are dealing with omnipotent beings, so there is a risk to life. If anything happens to one of us, the other uses Laura to gain an audience with Horus."

"I get all that, a sensible way to proceed. When do we start?"

"Have you got a free hour now?" Asked Liz.

"Yes, I have."

"I will put you to sleep, before dropping into the realm of dreams. Then I'll pull you in after me. It sounds complicated, but it isn't. The world of the Gods can be viewed from the world of dreams. I simply home in on the Wanderers and take you with me.....Easy."

"Yes, sounds easy-peasy." Said Mabina.

"I have been doing it alone and I'm used to where the Wanderers congregate."

"Alright, let's do it."

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~ The home of Jim Weaver, Cleckheaton – The present time ~

Patsy Smart had been given a pay rise at Hayle's Motor Factors, a really decent increase. She'd also been made the counter manager, which brought quite a few new responsibilities. The job that had been a fill in while she looked for something better, had turned into a career. Still in her mid-twenties, she'd have probably been thinking of a home with her man and maybe a kid or two. As her man was already claimed by another and a vampire, the natural progression of her life was on hold. A friend of hers had once had a long-term affair with a married man twice her age, that had eventually ended quite messily. That wasn't something Patsy would be silly enough to do. Then Simon had come along, who was over seven hundred years older than her. Despite knowing it was a huge mistake, Patsy had fallen for him. Simon belonged to Clara; she'd known that from the start. Most betrayed partners had ways of getting revenge on the other woman. Clara was a vampire with the occasional anger management problem. Patsy wasn't scared of Clara, but there had been times when sleeping with Simon, had felt like an extreme sport.

"I can take out most of the security system." Said Jim. "I can guarantee that the vault will have an extra layer of security, it's the way these people work. We will be locked in. It's not a question of if, but when."

"Don't worry, I can get us all out of anywhere." Said Laura. "I brought us all safely out of the British Museum. That wasn't a fluke Jim, trust me."

"How about electrical screening, can they block your mojo?" Asked Ronnie.

"No, it doesn't work like that." Said Laura. "The disc up against my ribs was created by a deity." Patsy didn't need to join in with the discussion, she already trusted Laura and her abilities to get things done. Laura wasn't just her best friend, she was a super person too, in her eyes. All she needed was a fancy sounding name and a multi-coloured costume.

"Laura can get us in and out." Said Patsy. "Are you sure your guy will buy my share, Jim?"

"Yes, he has contacts with private collectors." Said Jim. "Gold is in at the moment; he can find a home for everything you don't want to keep."

Patsy was there for the money; she couldn't live with her mum forever. Laura had asked her if she wanted to risk imprisonment, or worse, for a truly staggering sum of money. No flowering it up as something noble, or for the benefit of mankind.

"This is for us, Patsy." Laura had said. "Personal gain all the way. If it helps, think of it as being earned by all the risks we've taken for noble reasons in the past."

Patsy would keep one tiny piece of art, something wonderful crafted out of pure gold. She'd squirrel it away in her knicker drawer. It amused her to think of a distant relative turning up with it at TV antiques show, a long time in the future. Oh, their face when they were told it had been stolen in a heist.

"Not just nods and mumbles." Said Laura. "I want a clear verbal affirmative. Are we all ready to do this tonight? I know I am."

"Yeah, I'm still totally onboard." Said Ronnie.

"It was my idea, so yes, I'm in." Said Jim.

All eyes were looking at her and there were two points still worrying Patsy. A single one-off piece of dishonesty didn't overly concern her. Now Simon was gone, she'd begun trying to achieve the life goals she'd had at college. Patsy loved her mum, but she needed a place of her own. Not a mansion

in leafy Surrey, she wouldn't fall into the trap of conspicuous spending. A small house somewhere near her mum would do fine, she'd even get the obligatory twenty five year mortgage. The heist would provide a deposit though, something that would normally take her years to save. Then Patsy would move her wealth offshore and become just another honest citizen.

"I'm still worried about taking guns." Said Patsy. "I don't like the idea of hurting the guards, even if they're trying to hurt us. I don't want to destroy the building either, now I think about it."

"Yes, I have burned down two listed buildings, but....."

"It's three Laura, Clara mentioned three buildings burned to the ground." Said Patsy.

Her best friend in the entire world was glaring at her. The annoyance would pass though. Patsy wanted a few assurances about there being no dead guards, and no hole in the ground where Monkman Hall currently stood. Staff lived on the premises, quite a few staff.

"There was no alternative before, I was attacked." Said Laura. "I give you my word, that Monkman Hall will still be standing when we leave. If the situation looks too risky, I'll pull us all out. As for taking guns....Jim thinks there may be armed guards. I'll be honest Patsy, I'd rather agonise about killing a guard, than having the job of telling your mum you won't be coming home."

"Plus, my contacts think the museum has a few special items the public never sees." Said Jim. "There have been a lot of priceless items coming out of Iraq and Syria, even a few from Afghanistan.

Rumour has it that many have been illegally acquired by the Monkman Museum. If it helps, think of it less as theft and more that we're taking what they never legally owned. My contacts also mentioned armed guards, so I'm sorry.....But I'm taking a gun."

"Me too." Added Ronnie

Patsy imagined her own home, with enough money offshore to last several lifetimes. Suddenly it hit her, there'd be enough for her kids to never have to worry about getting on the council housing list, or their kids, or their kids.....

"So, we're definitely going to avoid hurting anyone?" She asked.

"Unless they're trying to kill us." Said Ronnie.

"There's a clock running, Patsy." Said Laura. "I'm needed in France by the end of the week. If we postpone this, it isn't likely to happen."

Her mum had Zeus to look after her, if she ended up in jail for years. Mabina had given her mum a tiny kitten, with hints that he'd protect her mum once he grew up. A small black and white kitten, had become a large friendly cat, who seemed to adore Evie, her mum. Her mum definitely doted on that cat, even after he'd killed the burglar. True, Simon had finished the man off, but it had been a mercy killing. Zeus could grow to several times his true size and become a whirl of sharp teeth and claws. Yes, her mum would be fine with the cat to look after her.

"Alright, I'm in....Let's get it done." Said Patsy.

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~ Pontassieve, not far from Florence – Italy during the time of the Medici ~

Giovanni didn't mind being loaned to other families, though Simon had occasionally complained about it. For a start, the Medici were a large family who controlled several entire regions. Working for someone they barely knew wasn't strange. Then sometimes one of the Medici family would lend an assassin to an ally, usually for a tricky one-off job. Working together, now that was rare, lending them both to an ally was almost unknown. Giovanni was excited and hoping there might be an opportunity to feed.

"He must have a lot of guards." Said Giovanni. "Stands to reason, if they needed both of us. The address too, they're not poor there. Money to burn if you live there, he must have a lot of guards."

"If not, I'm sure he'll have a family we can feed on." Said Simon.

"Are you sure, are we allowed to kill the family?"

"I was told they're not worried who gets killed." Said Simon.

They'd already used a game of cards, to decide who had first strike at the target. Giovanni had won the card game; the honour was his. It mattered, though no records were kept of such things. Those requiring the services of an assassin consulted people in the know and people in the know, remembered who had killed which target. Monseigneur Gori was well known, whoever killed him would gain a little fame and Giovanni craved that fame. He was currently paid less than Simon, which he found quite annoying.

"A man of the church, yet he has a mistress." Said Giovanni. "Children too...No wonder the world is in such a mess."

"Careful old friend, you're close to breaking the great unwritten rules." Said Simon. "Never have any curiosity about the target and never, ever. Talk about what a mess the world is in. People find their own route to hell."

Monseigneur didn't always signify a man of the church, though Giovanni was sure he'd heard Gori had once been a cardinal. A bright cardinal, tipped for the top. There he was, living in Pontassieve with his mistress and no less than four children. Giovanni wasn't really religious, but he felt he was destined to be God's sword hand, in the punishment of Monseigneur Gori. It was going to be a painful death.

"I can see candle light in a few windows." Said Simon. "We could go in through the garden windows, or climb up and go straight for Gori's bedroom."

"There might be something worth taking on the ground floor, bound to be."

"Ahh, my friend....We're being paid well, very well." Said Simon. "Surely, we can risk missing the Monseigneur's silver candlesticks? We could be home in our beds in an hour or two."

"Alright Simon, I'm not greedy. It's my kill though."

"Of course."

The good and wealthy people of Pontassieve did have patrols. They tended to be for show though, noisy men with lamps and large swords, to frighten off casual criminals. It was a dark night and vampire night vision is far better than that of most nocturnal creatures. Giovanni and Simon had easily avoided the patrols and were currently watching the windows of Gori's home. Just a two-floor villa, but it was spread out and then there were the gardens. Gori had to own over an acre of land in a wealthy area, which was quite impressive.

"Do you ever wonder why?" Asked Giovanni. "I mean, why those paying us want Gori killed?"

"No....Come on, the moon has just gone behind a cloud."

Gaps between stones and bricks, trellises no burglar would dare to trust with his life. Those and more were all climbable if you had the nerve and confidence of a vampire. A fall from a first floor might kill a human, but it would only be an annoyance to a vampire. Giovanni made sure he was first through the hallway window. He left the candle alone, snuffing it out would tell the guards there were intruders in the house. Simon tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to their right. Giovanni nodded and headed towards the master bedroom.

It happened, sometimes the target had guards outside their bedroom door. The two men were asleep in comfy looking chairs, but asleep or not, they were a huge problem. Wake them up by breaking open the bedroom door and they'd make a hell of a noise. Gori had a large house and money, so he was bound to have plenty of guards. Most would be asleep, but noise coming from near their master's bedroom was guaranteed to wake them up. There were several ways to deal

with the situation, all of them messy and prone to unforeseen consequences. Simon leant towards him and whispered.

“You hit the door hard and kill Gori. I’ll take care of these two.”

Giovanni nodded at Simon and didn’t hesitate. He folded his arms across his chest, lowered his gaze to protect his eyes a little, and ran at the door. It takes a really good door to stop a vampire moving at speed and the door wasn’t that good. The noise from shattering the door was incredible, as Giovanni arrived in the bedroom, covered in dust and debris. The screaming began almost immediately. Not that he intended to kill Gori’s mistress. There was no pay for killing her and he never killed for the sake of it. He might have fed on her, but there’d soon be a lot of guards on the way.

“Shut up.” He yelled at her.

It never worked, but he lived in hope that it might, one day. Giovanni ignored the screams and thrust his sword at Monseigneur Gori. Sometimes whoever had paid for the death wanted a few words spoken, but not in this case. He thrust his sword into Gori’s throat and twisted it a little. That was it, a quick and relatively painless death. There would be a lot of gasping and bleeding, drowning in his own blood wasn’t going to be pleasant. Compared to what Giovanni had been planning, it was a good death. By the time Giovanni was back in the hallway, Simon was dealing with an unforeseen consequence.

“They must have been patrolling close by.” Said Simon.

One guard dead on the floor, while Simon hacked an arm off a second. That left at least a dozen, all queueing up to fight them.

“Your master is dead, there’s no need to join him.” Yelled Giovanni.

Sometimes it worked though generally it didn’t. Guards who ran away found it impossible to find another employer. Much better to continue fighting and hope to kill the assassins, or at least be one of the few heroic survivors.

“Surrender and we’ll give you a quick death.” Yelled one of the guards.

A lie of course, public evisceration before being hung, was the usual punishment a captured assassin had to look forward to. Giovanni ran his sword through the chest of a guard and roared like a lion. It was all bravado though; he knew they were in trouble.

“More of them..... From behind us.” Said Simon.

Gori must have been very wealthy, good guards cost a lot to hire and equip and the guards were very good. The new arrivals had crossbows, which changed the game entirely. In the dark, in a narrow corridor, crossbows weren’t ideal. If the guards could find the right spot to use them though, he and Simon would never see another morning.

“The window.” Said Simon.

The window they’d come in by. A long drop to the garden, which the guards would probably avoid. It sounded a good choice of direction, until they were both at the window.

“Fuck, Gori hires more guards than the Brotherhood.” Said Giovanni. “No wonder they’re paying us well for this kill.”

“Come on, it’s not fun if they’re easy.” Said Simon.

Another group of guards in the garden, again armed with crossbows. Instead of jumping, Simon turned to his left and walked along a ledge in the stonework a mountain goat would have thought twice about. They’d be exposed to crossbow bolts from below, but it was a very dark night.

“We can get onto a lower roof from the end of the ledge.” Said Simon.

A few crossbow bolts hit the wall, but none seemed well aimed. They were close to the lower roof, when Giovanni felt something hit his left upper arm. The pain wasn't that bad, less than the last time he'd seen a bolt sticking out of his arm.

"Crap, one of them got me."

"Are you alright?" Asked Simon.

"Yeah, I'll pull it out once the blood congeals around it."

A jump down to the roof and the walls of the house gave them a little cover. It seemed none of the guards liked the look of the narrow ledge, no one was following them. Slippery tiles on the roof and an angle that made them keep to the ridge tiles. Giovanni followed Simon to the far end of the roof, where they both lay down, to survey the garden. There was safety in lying down on a dark night. To all but fellow vampires, they'd be invisible.

"Do we need to get that bolt out?" Asked Simon.

"No, it'll just make it bleed again. It'll wait awhile."

Giovanni knew Simon would have seen the lone guard, sat at the base of a large tree. Just one man, but his shouting would quickly bring the rest. The trick of course, was to deal with him without there being any shouting. It was a cloudy night, though the moon did occasionally appear in a gap between the clouds. When it went behind a particularly dark patch of clouds, Simon dropped from the roof. Just one floor up and landing on soft ground, he made less noise landing than a large cat.

The lone guard leaning against the tree, didn't even get a chance to stand up. Once he was sure the guard was dead, or in the process of dying, Giovanni dropped from the roof. He landed well, but the fall jarred the bolt stuck in his arm. It had to go, even if the wound did begin to bleed again. He grabbed the bolt and wrenched it out of the muscle of his upper arm. The need to scream was great, but Giovanni succeeded in resisting the urge. He found Simon stood over the dead guard.

"Pity he's dead, I could have done with feeding on him." Said Giovanni.

"I just wanted to make sure he didn't shout for help.....He won't be making any noise now, none at all."

Past a few trees and what looked like a kitchen garden and they were at the wall around Gori's estate. Not that high and there were trees close to the wall that were easy to climb. It was how they'd entered the property, but his arm hadn't been wounded then. With Simon helping him, Giovanni made it onto the top of the wall.

"There's a convent not far away." Said Simon. "Convents are good places; they rarely have guards. We can follow the wall and drop into their grounds."

"A little rest before the journey home sounds a good idea."

They were running away with their tails between their legs, but the target was dead. That was all that really mattered, it was all the person who'd employed them was interested in. Even if a guard recognised one of them, it didn't really matter. They were both employed by the Medici and Simon had contacts among the Brotherhood. It would take a very foolish guard to try and bring them to justice.

"Damn, it's beginning to rain." Said Giovanni.

They were running along the wall, when Giovanni recognised the grounds of the convent. He had no idea why his wound was suddenly so painful. The top of the wall was wet and they were running. Add the pain and he was never quite sure why, but he fell from the wall. It wasn't good, the convent was downhill from Gori's house, the wall was higher, much higher. Giovanni fell a long way, even for a vampire.

“Come on Giovanni, I know you’re not dead.” Said Simon. “And I’m definitely not carrying you home. Wake up.....You of all people, falling off a wall.”

“I didn’t fall, it was the rain.....And my arm.”

Giovanni was still at the base of the wall, right in the middle of a flower bed. His back ached, as did his legs. Actually, when he began to move slightly, just about everything ached.

“Do you think you broke anything ?” Asked Simon. “I could leave you here and go for the horses.”

“No, I’ll be fine.”

“I could ask the Sisters of Mercy to look after you. I bet they don’t get many people falling off their wall.”

“I didn’t.....Crap, you’re never going to let me forget this are you ?”

“No, never.”

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~ The world of dreams where time has no meaning ~

Despite her own misgivings, Mabina was enjoying drifting through the dreamworld. It bordered the realm of the Gods; she’d always known that. It takes a special gift though, to remain at the interface between what is real and what is nothing but a dream. Liz had that gift, while Mabina was just along for the ride.

“I see them.” Said Mabina. “They look so different here.”

The Wanderers looked the same as one another in several ways, as though they were a different species of Gods. Mabina knew that not everything she was seeing was strictly real. In the realm of the Gods though, it was all reality. Gold was the predominant colour, even the Wanderers had a golden hue to their bodies. Human bodies with bird like heads, the Wanderers were following each other around a ruined temple high up in the Chilean Andes.

“They come here a lot, it’s obviously important to them.” Said Liz.

There was the overlay to cope with, which still gave Mabina a headache. The temple was a ruin in the real world. In the realm of Gods, it was as beautiful as the day it was built. Both versions seemed to exist at the same time, one overlaying the other. It was like an optical illusion, that made her eyes hurt. The temple looked Mayan, though it might have been much older.

“They’re chanting.” Said Mabina.

Mabina didn’t know the language, but the style and tempo were familiar. Like knowing a piece of music is by a certain composer, even if you’ve never heard it before.

“Can you understand what they’re chanting ?” Asked Liz.

“No, but I know what they’re doing. They’re calling on someone or something.”

“You mean they’re summoning someone ?” Asked Liz.

“Not really, it’s more of a very polite will you talk to us. They’re asking someone powerful to join them, someone they don’t want to annoy.”

Liz must have pulled them back into reality, or at least what most people think of reality. They were sat on the sofa, heads supported by assorted cushions. There was that dreadful just woken up brain fog, though it was gone in a second.

“That’s it, we need to get an audience with the Ancient Gods.” Said Liz. “Laura can always see them when she wants to. We need to find Laura.”

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