

## Quid Pro Quo

(Season three of London's Night Stalkers)

### Chapter 23 – The Burglar

**“Simon found the man on the floor, leaning against Evie’s washing machine. Simon had seen that look before, the man was terrified to the point of being afraid to move, or even blink or breathe deeply.”**

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It always happened when he’d brought home a Thai food takeaway and there was something he wanted to watch on TV. Not something on demand, but a documentary that if he wasn’t sat in his lounge at nine that night, he’d miss it. There was a record function on the DVD machine attached to the TV, but it had all been so much easier with VHS. His one night alone that week had been diverted into something not at all relaxing, by a call from Patsy.

“Hi Simon, are you busy ?”

“I’ve a takeaway on the coffee table and something about penguins to watch at nine. If that counts as busy, I’m busy. Do you want to come over ? There’s enough food.”

“I was hoping you’d come over here. Remember what you thought might happen with Zeus ? Well.....It happened, sort of.”

Simon enjoyed a forkful of the wonderful food that he knew was going to be his first and last. His mind was filled with an image of Zeus sat on the chest of a dead burglar, while Evie sat in a corner.....Screaming.

“How bad is it Patsy ? Is Evie really upset ?”

“Best if you come over and see for yourself.”

His wonderful meal went into a bin bag, though he did try to set the almost incomprehensible DVD machine to record his documentary on penguins. The bin bag went into the wheelie bin, on his way to his elderly van. Simon deliberately stopped worrying, a neat trick of the vampire mind. Turn off all anxiety, stress and worries about what he might find. It was only a short drive away and after nearly eight hundred years of dealing with some truly catastrophic messes; he was sure he could sort out this one.

“Dump the body, kill the cat and calm down Evie.....Easy.” He muttered.

Of course it wouldn’t be that easy, it never was. There had been that time when he’d briefly lived in Berlin though. Getting rid of six bodies, while keeping a Baron’s niece clear of any suspicion. All to be done while trying to convince two servants that nothing was wrong. Now that had seemed impossible, yet he’d done it.

“It’ll be fine.”

There were no gaps outside the house, so he parked a few houses down. Patsy must have been watching for him, she had the door opened before he could ring the bell. She looked worried, but not in a panic.

“Sorry to call you.....He’s in the kitchen.” Said Patsy.

A greeting that gave rise to so many questions, though it was easier to simply follow her into the kitchen than ask them. Simon found the man on the floor, leaning against Evie’s washing machine. Simon had seen that look before, the man was terrified to the point of being afraid to move, or even blink or breathe deeply.

“Please tell me he’s a burglar and not a meter reader for the electric company.” He said.

“A burglar....He had the nerve to shout Boo at mum when she found him rummaging upstairs. Bastard, he had it coming.....Zeus got between him and the back door.”

Evie left the back door ajar all the time, claimed it helped her breathe better. As for Zeus, he was there, a low growl still coming out of his tiny throat. Actually he was no longer tiny, but he was still a long way from being fully grown. Zeus had positioned himself between the burglar and the open back door.

“How is Evie taking all this ?” He asked.

“Oh, mum’s fine. No rationalising it, no worries at all. Her pet cat suddenly grew to the size of a lion and scared a burglar shitless. Mum thinks that is brilliant. She actually told me she always thought Zeus was a bit special.”

“Better than her screaming for a week.”

“I suppose, but that would have been more natural. She’s in the lounge, looking forward to a TV programme about penguins.”

“I wanted to see that.”

Simon stroked Zeus and very carefully picked him up. The half-grown cat began to purr and snuggle up against him.

“Come on Zeus, you’ve done your job very well.” Said Simon. “Time to go into the lounge with Evie.”

No need to tell the burglar to stay put, he was still well and truly catatonic. Not that Simon was worried about the welfare of a burglar who was definitely not going to survive the night. With Zeus curled up in his arms, Simon walked into the lounge and deposited the bundle of fur on Evie’s lap.

“I hear he did well tonight Evie ?”

“He did, wonderful little chap. I always knew he was a bit special.”

“I hear you like penguins ?”

“I do, there’s a programme about them tonight.”

“How about I order us all some food and we watch it together ?” He asked.

“That would be brilliant.”

Simon went back into the kitchen and handed a credit card to Patsy, one that seemed only to be used for takeaways.

“I’m starving Patsy, order enough of whatever Evie and you like to feed an army, I’ll eat anything.”

“How about Thai ? Mum has sort of discovered Thai food quite recently.”

“Thai is fine, it was almost my dinner earlier tonight. Order it from the lounge and stay in there for a while....Alright ?”

“Yes, I understand.”

He was glad one of them understood, personally he was still finding the evening to be quite confusing. He sat on the floor next to the burglar, his back up against Evie’s washing machine.

“Sorry buddy, but you really do deserve this.”

It would have been nice to satisfy his need for blood, it had been a while. There was the risk of spots of blood in Evie’s kitchen though and the burglar’s DNA. He might well have told someone his intended route that night and the houses he intended to visit. Simon was sure Evie would happily lie to the police, but blood stains were too much of a risk. Simon leant over the man, before snapping his neck. It actually felt like a mercy killing, considering the man’s mental state.

“Into the garden shed for now and I’ll come back for you later.”

Said Simon, as he easily carried the dead burglar over his shoulder.

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Harry Beck was rarely called Harry by anyone anymore. A few friends and his family of course and a few in the police who'd known him for years. He'd now reached a point where just about everyone knew him as Harold Beck OBE and he had hopes of making that Sir Harold Beck. How proud his mum would have been of him, if she'd lived to see him get the OBE for his charity work. A higher profile could cause problems though; he didn't want any risk of negative stories in the press, even if it was just hints and hearsay. He'd only taken Burnett with him to the golf club in Harrow, though he had no intention of playing golf. The young police officer Burnett was now well and truly compromised, after Harry had arranged for Cyril to give him the deposit money for a modest two bedroom flat in West Drayton.

"He's here sir." Said Burnett

The couple who ran the club knew him; the bar wouldn't be opened until Harry had finished his meeting with Cyril H Carter. Just Cyril really, he'd added the H in his late twenties, because he thought it would look better on business cards. Even when he'd been just a glorified gofer for the William Jarrold gang, Cyril had always had plenty of ambition. Then as sometimes happen a new player arrived on the scene, a Simon Atherton. Jarrold was killed while still in HM Prison Belmarsh and Cyril was the new boss, the man at the top of just about everything crooked going on in Greater London. How Jarrold had been killed was still a mystery and Harry didn't really care. He just wanted Cyril to keep the blood off the streets. And of course there were the useful regular payments that Harry thought of as his pension fund.

"See him in and then lock the door.....From the outside." He told Burnett.

At one time Burnett would have gone on about rules and procedure. Now he was as meek as a lamb. The deposit on that flat had changed his junior officer for the better. Cyril came in looking as though he'd just bought the expensive suit he was wearing. Liked his dapper suits and expensive shoes did our Cyril.

"Cyril.....Been a while." Said Harry. "How's the fake meat business?"

"Going well, did you see the glowing report on us in the Observer?"

"Yes, my wife pointed it out to me."

At one time Harry had used threats when dealing with the assorted crooks and gangs of London, now he used pleasantries. He even poured Cyril coffee from a jug, his favourite brand. By the time Harry was sat down, Cyril was grinning at him like an old friend.

"You can probably guess why I asked to see you." Said Harry.

"The death of Imran in Ealing....Yes, very unfortunate."

"Deaths Cyril, two of his men were killed too. Your people had a busy morning. By the general brutality and ruthlessness, I'm guessing Alex was one of them."

Cyril took a sip of his coffee, nodding his appreciation of his favourite brand. It was like that now, expensive coffee and presents for Cyril's grandchildren at Christmas. No more knees in the groin and loosened teeth, there was that pension fund to consider.

"What can I say Harry, Tom has been doing a little freelance work for a new firm operating in the Luton area. Things got a bit out of control. Just one of those bad days, hopefully a once in a decade event."

There was even a breakfast being prepared in the kitchens, Cyril's much loved full English. There were times when Harry missed the old days, but all the rough stuff had wreaked havoc with his lower back.

“Just keep it off the streets and out of the papers Cyril. Too many news items about mob violence, with pictures of blood soaked floors.....The government will announce another damned inquiry or something just as daft. Keep it private, keep it out of the papers Cyril...Please.”

“I’m sorry Harry, I really am. How do you fancy getting into the artificial meat business ? I could pass a few shares in my company in your direction. Just to show my appreciation for your help.”

“It would need to be through an offshore company I use, but yes, that would be nice. Thank you Cyril. There’s a bit of breakfast arriving soon, your favourite.”

“A full English.....Brilliant Harry.”

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There were several signs above the door of the building. Two were in English, one in Arabic, with about another three in languages Laura couldn’t read.

‘Amman Quality Rugs.’

‘Khatib’s Rug Emporium.’

‘الجودة عالي أردني سجاد.’

There were a few pictures of rugs in the ground floor windows and a sign saying they sold wholesale and retail. It seemed a bit too easy to simply enter a showroom open to the public, when Yosef lived in the top two floors of the same building. Laura had called to check the opening hours, before arriving with Tim. Just a young couple from Britain, looking for a few really nice rugs.

“It seems a bit too.....” Said Tim.

“Easy, yes I know. I will be recognised by some of his people. Being head of security for the Silver Dawn, means saying goodbye to anonymity. I think that might be a good thing. Yosef will be forewarned, but shaking him up a bit might make him careless.”

“Aren’t the Silver Dawn his friends ?” Asked Tim.

“Some are, others aren’t....It’s complicated.”

The inside of the emporium reminded her of the souks she’d seen in Jerusalem and Luxor. Lots of lighting, but all in different colours to bring out the shades of the rugs. Yosef didn’t only deal in rugs, there were was a lot of different lighting ideas, all for sale.

“Oh, you have to promise to stop me buying everything.” Said Laura.

Big rugs, small rugs and one that looked just perfect for next to her bed in her new apartment. Fluffy pink might look very feminine, but the existing one had to go. By the time she’d looked at three or four rugs and discussed them with Tim, a salesman appeared.

“Hello, are you Australians ?” He asked. “We get a lot of Australians in Amman.”

Why could no one anywhere in the world tell the difference between an Australian accent and a British one. It had happened so many times, that it was fast becoming a bit of a ‘thing’ for Laura.

“No, we’re from London.” Said Tim.

“Ah yes, we get a lot of British people in here too. I am Omar....I did notice you were looking at this rug, and a few others. We ship anywhere in the world.”

Laura was still feeling a bit prickly after being mistaken for an Australian.

“They’re very expensive.” She said.

“But a rug of this quality.....You aren’t buying for yourself, you’re looking after it for the next generation, and the next.”

He was good and although the prices were eye watering, she could afford the rugs she wanted. She was tempted to buy a few wall lights too.

“My name is Laura and I think I’m going to take up most of your morning.” She said.

“Good, I will arrange for some coffee.” Said Omar.

If he knew who she was, he was a very good actor. He didn't blink when she gave the Brittany address of the Silver Dawn for the delivery. Laura bought all the four rugs she'd liked the look of and two more as presents for Simon and Clara. By the time she'd bought several wall lights and a couple of lamps for her lounge, she'd spent a huge amount of money. Again, when she used the bank card with her real name on it, no alarms began to go off. She even told Omar which hotel they were staying at.

"Thank you Omar, I will recommend you to my friends." She said as they left.

"Shall I call you taxi?"

"No we'll walk....Out hotel is quite close. We're at the St Regis."

It had been a good opportunity to look the place over and she really had wanted to buy some rugs. Laura now knew where the alarms were and the various intruder detectors on that floor. With stock of that kind of value the alarm system was good, but not good enough to keep her out. Yosef probably had his own private elevator somewhere, but the main stairs appeared to begin at the rear of the rug emporium.

"That was a very productive morning Tim." She said. "I'll need to visit the place in the early hours of the morning to do a thorough job of looking it over, but today was just about perfect."

"Do you think Yosef might attack us in the hotel?" Asked Tim.

"No, but if half the things I've heard about him are true....He'll invite us out for dinner one night."

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They were less than a mile from the eighteenth gate to the underworld, when the wall of flame appeared in front of them. No trench in the ground full of volatile liquids, no sign at all about where the flames were coming from. It was just there, a wall of fire so intense they were having to keep about fifty yards away from the heat of the inferno.

"I hadn't expected this." Said Liz. "Anyone got any ideas about getting past it?"

"I think Thoth is really pissed at me." Said Mabina.

"Oh, why did it have to be fire." Said Clara. "I'm not good when it comes to fire."

Which had to be the understatement of the century. It had all begun when she'd been just a child, what would now be called a toddler. Able to walk and talk quite well, even understand what her family did to earn a living. Clara had to guess at her age, but thought she'd probably been somewhere between three and four years old. Her father and older brother worked the local mill, while her mother and older sister looked after their home and cultivated vegetable in their garden. Life was hard, especially during a bad winter and the previous winter had been bitterly cold.

"God punishes us for our sins." Her mother had told her.

Clara had no real notion of God then and sin seemed to be something that only grownups understood. Her understanding of sin was soon to be greatly increased, but at the time of the incident, she was still an innocent human girl child.

"Don't get under our feet Clara." Her mother had told her.

The last words her mother had said to her and now Clara found it hard to picture her mother's face. Most of her memories were of the smell that came from her mother's apron. Wet flour, mixed with lavender and the sweat of hard work.

They'd all been there, her entire family, and the farmer wanting his wheat milled had brought his own children. There was almost a holiday feel to the day, at least for the young children. Clara had another child her age to play with, even if he was a boy. He'd been there, a labourer then, easily carrying huge sacks out to the waggons. Called Daniel even then, though she doubted that it had

ever been the name he'd been christened. If he ever had been christened ? Something about Daniel made her doubt he'd ever been a member of any God fearing faith.

"What a mess you're in." Her father had said. "Covered from head to foot in flour."

The last words her father had ever said and he'd been laughing, which made the memory perfect. Clara found it impossible to see his face properly, the five hundred or so year in between had robbed her memory of those precious details.

There was no warning ! Perhaps a spark at just the wrong moment ? There had been a huge amount of flour in the air. Little breeze that day, to keep the dust moving, little humidity in the air to dampen it down. Clara had read up on flour fires once, surprised at how common they'd been in the old wooden mills. Not just flames and intense heat, but explosions too.

"Can I help ?"

"No, it's heavy work."

The last words her brother had said to her. A bright light had dazzled her then, making her fall over backwards. Next he was on top of her, holding her down. Daniel, though she didn't learn his name until after he was called a hero.

"Stay down girl and stop struggling."

Daniel covered her completely, his hands pushing her down, his cheek hard against hers. Clara felt heat and heard someone screaming, but one specific odour always punctuated her memories at that point. Daniel burning, his skin blistering, his hair igniting, giving off that terrible smell. It felt as though he'd covered her body with his for hours, yet it could only have been a minute at most.

"Don't look child, don't look." He told her. "You'll be fine now."

Daniel turned his back to her and his skin was cooked. That was how she'd thought of it as a child, the crackling on the pigs they ate at Christmas. Since that dreadful day, Clara had more than just an ordinary fear of fire, it terrified her.

"Are you going to be alright ?" Asked Liz.

"I'll have to be won't I....So, what's the plan ?" Asked Clara. "I'm assuming setting up camp until it burns itself out isn't an option."

They were both looking concerned, but they were both also nodding. Clara wasn't a fool, she knew the fire was there to stay unless something was done to either get rid of it, or get round it.

"We should look along the fire wall, getting as close as we can." Said Liz. "There might be something generating it."

"Sounds nonsense....But at least we'll be doing something." Said Mabina.

"That's it, think positive." Said Clara. "Come on, let's see how far this fire goes."

It probably stopped at the cavern wall in the far distance on either side. How far was that ? None of them really knew, including Liz. As Clara set off across the rubble strewn ground, she was intent on treating it like a journey of discovery.

"I've been terrified of fire for over five hundred years." She said. "So, I'm going to treat this as well overdue therapy."

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'The millstones of the gods grind late, but they grind fine.' Or least that was what Plutarch thought in about the first century AD. Not that his thoughts were original. Ideas about vast slowly moving wheels of the Gods, had been around for countless millennia. Usually the wheels were seen as grinding the guilty, those who had committed sins that only the Gods could punish. Even the Roman Sibylline Oracles picked up the idea from wherever they gained their wisdom 'but the divine mill will at last grind the flour.'

All terrifying hints at the fate awaiting those who committed sins too vast to be dealt with by human law. The wheels didn't just punish, they could also be used to repair time, or rebuild sections of time completely. As the Ancient Egyptian God Huh heard the thud of a cogwheel as it jumped a notch he was pleased.

Not really a he, or a her, the God had male and female forms. The God of time, eternity and infinity, he was one of the oldest of the great ancient Gods. The Egyptians labelled him the God of a million years, because to them, a million years was eternity.

"I am sorry Brother Alberti you served me well." Huh muttered. "I have need of you, so I must disturb your eternal slumber."

Huh, sometimes known as Heh, sometimes known as Hehu, or a hundred other names. Usually shown as a frog's head on a human body, though being a God. He could choose to look pretty much how he pleased. He frowned, a cog on the immense wheels of time refused to drop into place.

"Oh Simon Atherton.....If you weren't needed, I'd punish you for disturbing eternity. Looking at a past version of yourself.....The audacity."

Huh actually laughed, a rare sound in his domain in the realm of the Ancient Gods. He looked into the past with as much ease as most could see the present. Past, present, future they were all his to alter and change. Precision was needed though, perfect precision.

"Ah, Niña the strange girl child. You deserve another chance at life, and you're likely to use that chance well. I just hope you don't end up viewing life as a curse. Many do...Sadly many do."

Still the cog in the mighty wheel refused to drop into the slot where it didn't yet truly belong.

Something was wrong, a paradox too huge to simply ignore. Huh knew what it was of course, he was probably the only truly omniscient God, though only when he chose to be. Most of the time he viewed knowing all and seeing all, as a bit tedious.

"Simon.....Oh my dear Simon, what am I to do with you?" He muttered. "The time isn't quite right yet, but there can't be two temporally active versions of you.....Even I can't break the oldest of rules."

He briefly thought as Hauhet, his feminine form. Sometimes mixing the minds of male and female, gave him solution he'd otherwise have missed. There couldn't be two Simon's alive and active in among the wheels of time and eternity, it just couldn't be allowed to happen. It might cause no problems of course, or a few minor headaches.

"Or it might cause the destruction of that entire part of the cosmos." Muttered his female form.

A few other minor pieces in the game needed changing, though not that fool Giovanni. Many failings could be ignored or glossed over, but not stupidity of that magnitude. Giovanni would die as he had already died. While trying to rob a liquor store in New York USA, in the nineteen seventies. Huh's mind hesitated over doing what had to be done.

"Sorry Simon, there is no other way."

The God side of his mind flashed into life for the tiniest fraction of a second and there was only one Simon active in among the huge wheels of eternity. Huh smiled as he heard the immense cog drop into the correct slot.

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Laura hadn't slept that well, though she usually did after unhurried sex with Tim. She wasn't worried about a small army of Yosef's assassins arriving at the hotel. She had read and heard enough about him from Mabina, to know he didn't work like that. It simply wasn't his style.

"Tim, are you awake?" She asked, softly.

No, he wasn't. The man she thought the world of was actually quietly snoring. Laura got up and still naked, she headed for the minibar. Thanks to vampire sight, she got across the hotel room without her toes finding anything in the dark. Her eyes objected to the light as she opened the door of the minibar.

"I know you're expensive....But this is an emergency."

Laura had no idea what was troubling her unconscious to the point where sleep was impossible. Something weird was going on though and she hoped half a bottle of champagne might relax her enough to be unconscious for a few hours. She could function without sleep for days, once fourteen days in a row. Lack of sleep always made her cranky and miserable though, so she tried to get at least two or three hours a night. Tim twitched in his sleep as she popped the bottle open, but he didn't wake up.

"Some use you'd be if an intruder broke in." She mumbled.

She took a huge swig straight out of the bottle and regretted it, as the bubbles went up her nose. The wonderful tasting liquid managed to get all over her face and neck too. She grabbed a paper towel and wiped herself down a bit.

"What is wrong with me tonight ?"

Laura was learning, she filled a glass with champagne and took it over to the window. The curtains weren't closed, there was no one close enough or high enough to see them having sex, or her standing naked at the window.

"It's out there somewhere." She muttered.

"What is ?" Asked Tim.

"Whatever is keeping me awake tonight."

It was nice having him awake, even if it did mean sharing the ridiculously expensive champagne.

"It's just your first night in a different bed Laura."

"Maybe, it just feels like more than that."

The noise when it came sounded like a tremendous thud. A sound so loud it nearly knocked Laura off her feet. A sound that kept coming, until she had to grab the window frame to stay on her feet. By the time it stopped, the floor under her feet seemed to be vibrating.

"Are you alright Laura ?"

"I am now that dreadful sound has stopped. Maybe there was an earthquake. Do they have earthquakes in Jordan ?"

"What sound....I didn't hear anything." Said Tim.

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Jack had no idea what time it was in the real world and he didn't care. He was deep into the realm of dreams, with Wiremi the Seer as his constant companion. He'd never mentioned it to his mother or Daniel, but suddenly being better focused on the world wasn't all good news. From nowhere and unbidden had come the memory of him killing Steve Gorman, in a fairly brutal way.

"He was by any definition a bad man Jack." Wiremi had told him. "You thought he meant to harm you and those you love, so you stabbed him to death."

"He would have killed my mum and Daniel."

"Does knowing that take away the feelings of guilt ?" Wiremi had asked him.

"No, it doesn't."

"There are many ways for your mind to resolve the dilemma Jack and none of them are wrong. One day you will decide on a way to ease your conscience."



That had been some time ago in the way the real world handles time, and a very long time in the realm of dreams. Jack hadn't completely lost his feelings of guilt at killing Steve Gorman, but he'd reached a kind of understanding with his own feelings. Not perfect, but Wiremi had said that there was no wrong way. He'd have been destroyed by the loss of his mum, whereas the death of Gorman just made him feel guilty. Therefore he'd chosen the lesser of two evils.

"Stay close to the Great Tree Jack, I can feel a storm building." Said Wiremi.

"But there are never storms in this world."

The Great Tree, the centre of the village and probably the entire forest. He'd never seen its branches sway with the wind before, but they were bending now. When it began to lose leaves to the growing storm, Jack knew something terrifying was happening.

"The fire has gone out." Someone shouted.

The villagers who never looked quite human were running towards their yurts, so Jack ran with them, joining a family he didn't know. Two of their children clung to him, as the sounds of a massive storm stopped any idea of talking. Above the sound of thunder he heard it. Over the sound of trees crashing down, he heard it. Above the sound of villagers wailing in fear, Jack heard it. A thud so loud it hurt his ears.

"The Gods are angry with us." Said a child.

Jack didn't argue, the child might well have been right. By the time everyone felt it was safe to leave their yurts, there were holes in their wonderful forest. Trees that had been there since the beginning of time had fallen, sometimes dragging other trees with them. The Great Tree was still standing, though two of its huge branches had been broken off by the storm.

"The broken branches will be planted and become new trees." Said Wiremi.

Jack hadn't even seen the Seer approach, but that was often the way with Wiremi. The Seer had never looked old before, or at least not that old. Now he seemed to have suffered with his beloved forest. There was even a piece missing from his left ear. Blood....It appeared it was possible to bleed in the realm of dreams and Wiremi was bleeding.

"You're hurt...Your ear." Said Jack.

"The bleeding will stop, the ear will heal."

"Are the Gods angry at us Wiremi?"

"No, though no natural storm ever affects the forest. The one who writes the words has decided to change a few things."

"The one who writes the words....I don't understand Wiremi."

"The past is written Jack, the book cannot be reopened, unless.....Yes, the one who controls the wheels of the Gods has decided to change the future, the present and maybe the past too. A rare thing to happen very rare. I need to think on this Jack."

The villagers were already tidying up, one was relighting the huge fire that was never allowed to go out.

"Will the forest recover?" Asked Jack.

"It always recovers, always.....I will send you home now and come for when you're needed. Prepare yourself Jack. I can't help feeling what has been written about you has been changed."

It was light when Jack opened his eyes. He was in his own bedroom and the clock told him it was still at least an hour before his mum usually came to wake him up. He felt.....Different in some way.

"I'm not sure if I like the idea of parts of my life being.....Unwritten." He muttered.

Being awake early meant the pigs being fed early, which they'd like. It seemed a weird storm in the realm of dreams was good news for someone, even if it was just the pigs. Jack got out of bed and

went to the drawers where his clean T shirts were kept. Only he couldn't get there, because one of the shadow creatures was in the way.

"Damn." Said Jack, as he stepped back.

He hadn't seen it in the little bit of light coming through the gaps in his bedroom curtains. And of course he hadn't been expecting to find one of the shadows lurking in his bedroom. It looked solid and it wasn't moving, or reacting to his presence. Jack waved his hand in front of the creature's face....Nothing, no reaction.

"Are you dead?" He muttered.

Touching it was hard, as if his finger had a mind of its own. Jack wanted to touch the solid looking shadow, but his finger kept pulling back.

"This is stupid, touch the damn thing."

At last his finger touched the creature between its eyes, right at the top of its nose. No feeling of warm flesh, no feeling of touching much of anything. The shadow creature felt barely solid and even that quickly changed. It became a cloud of fine dust, which in turn became nothing but a dark swirl in the air, before vanishing completely.

"Fuck."

Jack rarely used foul language, but he felt the situation required it. And of course, he'd probably learned a few bad habits from Laura.

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They'd walked the length of the wall of fire in one direction, until it had met the wall of the vast cavern. There was no way through it, not even the smallest gap to try and squeeze through. No sign of what was causing the intense fire, it was simply there. The curtain of fire was quite thin though, probably no more than a foot or so, though the heat was too hot to bear several yards from the flame wall. Liz realised that if anyone could do anything, it was her.

"This might not get rid of the wall, but I can probably survive running through it." She said. "It'll mean becoming the Unnamed one though, fully the Unnamed one. I'm certain a few flames won't harm me then, though I might forget about the wall and try to kill you both."

"Sorry Liz, but that had to be the most shit plan I've ever heard." Said Clara.

"And you might not find a way to stop the flames from that side." Added Mabina.

"I said it was an idea....I never said it was a good idea." Said Liz.

They sat on the rubble and simply sat there quietly for a while, all three of them. Liz was trying to think of something clever that might get them to the other side of the wall. Laura could easily get them to the other side, though Liz could see a problem with that idea.

"Have either of you a way to summon Laura?" She asked.

"No, and she'd not expected to visit us again." Said Clara.

"No." Added Mabina.

Liz was reconciled to hours of them all coming up with ideas, only to see them shot down by that evil duo, common sense and logic.

"Now I think about it." Said Clara. "There might be....."

Her idea might have been brilliant, but she never got to tell them. Their hounds began to howl loud enough to wake the long dead pharaohs.

"What set them off?" Asked Mabina.

When bits of loose rock began to fall from the cavern roof, Liz knew something serious was happening. There was also a voice in her head, talking about what was written being unwritten. For

a while the cavern floor jumped about and all three of them clung to the rocky floor as best they could. It all ended with the loud sound of a distant thud. Instantly the wall of flame vanished.

“Come on Liz, you must have an idea about what happened.” Said Clara.

“Something wanted to hold us here for a while.”

“Is that it, all you know ?” Asked Mabina.

“What has been written, has been unwritten.” Said Liz.

“What does that mean ?” Asked Clara.

“Things have changed.....Oh, and our hounds have vanished.”

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