

**Clara Copley**

**(Season five of London's Night Stalkers)**

**Chapter 3 – Nativitas – Birth**

**“Do you really think we might be attacked ?” Asked Noah.**

**“Definitely and probably at around four am, one morning.” Said Laura. “The chronically sick in hospitals tend to pass away at four in the morning. It’s when our circadian rhythm reaches its lowest point. We’re at our lowest ebb then and the least able to deal with an emergency.”**

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**~ Hornsey – In the nursery ~**

It was as if Jim Weaver had been summoned in some way, to arrive just after the top of the baby’s head appeared. Hacker Jim muttered about getting supplies from Aksoy’s all night minimart.

“Bought lots of toilet rolls, we’re bound to need them.” Jim muttered. “It’s like the end of the world out there, never seen a storm like it.”

He’d brought up the old FM radio, which had been in the kitchen at Wood Green for years and now inhabited the kitchen in Hornsey. How many bacon sandwiches had it witnessed being eaten ? How many cups of coffee being consumed ?

“This will keep you in touch with the world.”

Said Jim, as he placed the small and slightly grubby radio, on the crib where Justin would sleep. Jim then sat in the doorway, with his feet halfway up the doorframe. He seemed to be a finger nail biter when he was anxious. No questions, no being an annoyance. Jim watched from the door, while nibbling at his nails. The radio could have been an annoyance, but it was on quite low. Mostly very old easy listening music from the eighties, with news items on the North London deluge as the newscaster was calling it.

“It’s coming.....your baby is coming into the world, Clara.” Said Daniel.

The birth, the Nativitas as Mabina had been referring to it. Nativitas, an old Latin word for birth, which meant much more in some of the ancient books, or at least that was what Mabina had told her. Not that Mabina was there yet, or likely to be. The guy on the radio was going on about biblical levels of rain, right across London. Biblical rain.....How wonderfully apt. Clara had been like having an inarticulate wild creature in the room. The imminent arrival of her son, seemed to have a good effect on her.

“Justin.....I can feel him.” Said Clara.

“Stop pushing so hard.....Lots of short breaths now.” Said Daniel.

Patsy could do more now she wasn’t having to hold down an angry vampire. Not that she knew what to do, winging it wasn’t even close. More water, Clara must have been dehydrated by it all. Patsy offered her a cup of water and much to her relief, Clara drank it.

“Very soon now, Clara.....Very soon.” Said Daniel.

Outside a lot of things were still howling, or rather screaming in a very human like voice.

“What the hell is out there ?” Asked Patsy.

“Foxes, just about every fox in London.” Said Jim. “All crouching in the garden and screeching at the house. I’m sure they’ll all vanish when the sun rises.”

“I hope so.” Said Patsy.

After waiting for so long, the final part of the birth was sudden, almost too quick. Clara yelled and there was more blood. Patsy had always hated blood, but she was getting used to seeing a lot of it. Daniel gave Patsy a large clean towel he must have been saving for that moment. No instructions, but Patsy instinctively knew what to do with it.

“Crap.....She just had a baby.” Said Jim.

He must have had the perfect view, from where he was sat in the doorway. A baby appeared, covered in blood and some kind of mucus. All wet and slippery, Patsy was careful how she got hold on Clara’s son. A good wipe with the towel and.....

“What do I do next, Daniel?”

“Is he alright?” Asked Clara.

Daniel looked at her and Patsy knew what she had to do. A one of a kind child born of two vampires, he might be physically different to most human babies. Some might say deformed, but Patsy preferred to think of the correct word as.....Different. No smacking him to get Justin to cry, that tended to be part of a more brutal age of childbirth. Patsy rested Justin on her chest and felt his heartbeat. Fast, but Mabina had told her all new born babies had a fast heartbeat. Patsy hugged Clara’s son and kissed his still bloody cheek.

“Let’s have a look at you.” Said Patsy.

Two arms and two legs, with just the right number of fingers and toes. Two very cute little ears and blue eyes, with a slight hint of green. The hint of green, reminded Patsy of his father’s eyes. Impossible to look at internal organs, but physically.....Clara’s baby was perfect. As Patsy wiped off the last of the blood, Justin Ned Atherton began to cry. Clara put out her arms and Patsy handed Justin to her.

“He’s beautiful.....Perfect.” Said Patsy.

Clara hugged her baby and just for a moment, Patsy wished it had been her, holding Simon’s child. It was supposed to have been impossible, but that didn’t take into account jade figurines and very ancient magic.

“Let everything drain.....Then you’ll need a few stitches.” Daniel said to Clara.

At that moment everything seemed quite ordinary, just another mum having a slightly difficult birth. Clara bit through the umbilical cord, like some kind of wild creature. Daniel tidied it up and carefully tied a knot in it.

“Not the first baby I’ve delivered, but definitely the first vampire child.” Said Daniel.

“The foxes have stopped screaming.” Said Hacker Jim.

“The first hint of daylight.....Justin was born just before dawn.” Said Daniel.

“I hope that is a good omen.” Said Clara.

Patsy looked out of the window and it was still raining. It looked so ordinary out there though, just another normal morning. Even the lightning had stopped. Clara touched her hand.

“Sorry for giving you a hard time.....I wasn’t myself.” Said Clara.

“You bit me.....Do I get an apology?” Asked Daniel.

“Oh, poor Daniel.....I can’t even remember why I was so angry.” Said Clara. “Please forgive me, because I have a favour to ask of you.”

“You’re lucky I have a soft spot for new mums.” Said Daniel. “What is this favour you’re looking for?”

“Stitch me up before Mabina arrives.” Said Clara. “She’s a very good nurse, but the way she puts in stitches.....It’s always agony. Where is Mabina by the way?”

“Lost in the storm was the last I heard.” Said Patsy.

Jim was chucked out and Daniel actually let her help with the stitches. Mabina arrived about an hour later. She was cursing Ronnie for taking the wrong road, the weather in general and quite a few other things. Luckily Niña knew the right magic words to get Mabina in a better mood.

“Coffee, Mabina ?” Asked Niña. “And I think there are still a few pastries left from yesterday.”

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### ~ Preparing their downstairs defences ~

“I never mentioned it to Patsy.” Said Daniel. “Too busy delivering a baby to worry about it, I suppose. Clara’s heart stopped just before Justin was born. Only four or five missed beats and then it was fine again. For a moment, it terrified me.”

Laura and Tim had been out hunting, to find some fresh blood for Clara. There was a sedated middle aged guy in the basement, so the hunt had been a success. The weather though, had been terrible. A flood on the north circular road had trapped them. She and Tim had ended up sleeping in the back of her van. Still drowsy but the stopped heartbeats were jogging a memory she couldn’t quite get hold of.....

“How many beats did her heart miss ?” Asked Laura. “Do you remember the exact number ?”

“Not really, does it matter ?” Asked Daniel.

“I think it might, I remember a mention in an old book.” Said Laura. “Not just born of a vampire, technically Justin was born of the dead too. I think some serious mojo may be linked to that.”

“Are you sure ? I’ve never heard of it.” Said Daniel.

“I still officially work as security consultant for the Silver Dawn in Brittany. Not so easy to get there now I can’t move through the world of the ancients Gods, but I’m still on their payroll. I used to read everything I could find in on vampires, in their library of forbidden works.” Said Laura. “There was definitely something about the lost heartbeats before the birth of a special child.”

Laura had liked the Silver Dawn headquarters; they’d provided her with a wonderful apartment to live in. Quickly travelling through the ether was different to airlines though, or driving after a trip through the Eurotunnel. Instead of effectively living there, she now only went there a few days a month....With Tim of course.

“I’ve heard of their library.” Said Daniel. “It’s supposed to be the best library of the occult in existence. Can you go there and refresh your memory ? I have a feeling it might be important.”

“I’ll talk to Tim and arrange something.” Said Laura. “Might be next week, but I will find that old book.....Actually I now think it was a scroll recovered from El Obeid in the Sudan.”

“Even more likely to be important.” Said Daniel. “Get there as soon as you can.”

They were supposedly making the house invasion proof. Tired and really needing a nap at the very least, it had been a long night. The idea was to move heavy hardwood furniture, to where it could be used to shelter from attackers. The Weapons of the Fallen, had been a gift from Horus to Laura. They were one of the few gifts that seemed to be permanent, in that they hadn’t vanished after Laura had taken Q’uq’umatz out of existence. Most of the weapons had useful enchantments. Laura was busy hiding the weapons in cupboards and drawers. They’d know where they were, but the enemy wouldn’t.

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### ~ Preparing their upstairs defences ~

Veronica Neophytou was known as Ronnie to just about everyone. Once called the most annoying person in the world, by Simon. He’d employed her as a telesales person, but that had been a few years ago. Ronnie had been part of a gang selling weed in North London. She’d ended up running the gang, right across several affluent postcodes. It hadn’t seemed much of a step to work for Cyril H

Carter and ultimately, be one of Clara's people. Not a vampire, but she had no problem with working for one. She was currently shoving a large wardrobe out of the spare bedroom and onto the landing. The idea was to make life hard for an attacker, without making the house look like The Alamo.....

"I see Clara decided to fortify her home." Said Mabina.

Mabina had missed her big moment and Daniel had brought baby Justin into the world. Mabina held grudges for years and was currently being a total bitch. Ronnie was trying to get things done, while ignoring Mabina as much as possible.

"First sound of gunfire and the police will be here." Added Mabina.

Jim dropped a crate, making a hell of a noise. Probably a deliberate way to show his annoyance.

None of them really disliked Mabina, apart from when she was in full bitch mode.

"It won't be that kind of a fight." Said Jim.

"Oh, so you're the expert now.....Everyone is suddenly an expert." Said Mabina.

They had all been enemies with Mabina, who had come close to killing Simon. Her blade had touched his heart; it had been a close thing. Now they all fought together and that changed things. Ronnie touched Mabina's arm.

"Sorry, you should have been the midwife." Said Ronnie. "You weren't though, the weather and my bad driving saw to that. Now we all need one another, so get over it."

Mabina would either storm off and sulk for a week, or be alright. Luckily her anger seemed to be fading away fairly quickly, which was rare. Mabina held Ronnie's hand, though only for a second or so.

"You're right of course." Said Mabina. "So.....Tell me Daniel's plan for the Hornsey Fortress?"

"Actually the idea was Clara's and she knows a thing or two about battles." Said Jim.

"This house is fully detached, a good thirty feet from any other house." Said Ronnie. "Normal human voices won't reach and I doubt if the sound of fighting will either, not with swords and other medieval weapons. Clara believes occultists will come after her child. They won't use firearms anywhere near the precious boy."

"No guns.....No cops on the doorstep." Added Jim.

"Does Clara feel an attack is likely?" Asked Mabina.

"She thinks an attack of some kind is certain." Said Ronnie. "She thinks it might be an attack by dark forces.....Magic wielded by shadowy beings."

"Then I'd better help.....What furniture are we shoving about next?" Asked Mabina.

"Simon left three wardrobes full of his clothes." Said Ronnie. "We're moving them full.....They'll make a good barricade to defend the nursery."

Mabina helped them move two wardrobes; before Niña told her Clara needed her. That left just her and Jim to shift the third wardrobe and get them all in the right position. They had to form a useful barricade, without stopping access to Clara and her baby. Simon had a set of drawers, which made a good solid object to get behind if necessary.

"I think we've done it." Said Jim. "As good as we can make it with wardrobes and other bits of furniture."

"Not quite finished." Said Ronnie.

She opened one wardrobe door and there was a leather jacket she'd always admired, when Simon had been wearing it. Ronnie picked up a blade from a pile of weapons they were hiding in various places. The one she liked had no name, but it granted a little extra strength to whoever wielded it. A little extra strength to a mortal woman in a house full of vampires.....Was priceless.

"This blade is mine.....Don't let anyone else touch it." Said Ronnie.

“Trust me my beloved.....I wouldn’t dare let anyone else use it.” Said Jim.

Jim received a friendly grin for his words and he’d receive a more intimate reward, later that night. Ronnie dropped the blade down into a sleeve on Simon’s leather jacket. It sort of hung there, wobbling a little, but it wasn’t going anywhere.

“Perfect.” She muttered.

“I just wish we knew what might attack us.” Said Jim.

“Me too.....We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.” Said Ronnie.

There was a plan, though it all depended on whether those trying to abduct the baby were humans, or some kind of otherworldly creatures. Not aliens as such, but the creatures of darkness constantly looking for a way into the world of people, normal humans. Justin wasn’t just special; he might grow up to be some kind of magical being. Clara thought there might be several occult groups hoping to grab him.

“So.....We guard these floors, while Laura and Tim look after downstairs.” Said Jim. “A simple plan, but I quite like simple plans. Less to go wrong, though something always does.....Go wrong.”

“And Niña helps if anyone looks to be in trouble.” Said Ronnie. “Daniel will stay with Clara; no matter what.....He’ll protect the child and its mother. I’m not sure where Noah fits in, I’ll ask Clara.”

“Built like two brick outhouses, stuck together.” Said Jim. “A guy that size.....He scares me, so he has to be useful in a fight.”

Did Noah realise that Clara was a vampire ? That was one of Clara’s little secrets that she tended to keep to herself. She might have even slept with Noah, though no one was sure. Jim was right though, a guy that size had to be useful if there was an attack on the house. Ronnie made up her mind to ask Clara about Noah.

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### ~ From top to bottom ~

Day three and Justin was two days old. Laura had decided to do a top to bottom on the house, at least twice a day. Really from bottom to top, but she preferred the sound of top to bottom. When she wasn’t there, Ronnie had agreed to take over the routine. Noah would be there too, in case Ronnie needed support. It seemed Noah did realise Clara was a vampire. Had she told him, or was he just observant and clever ? Not that it really mattered. He was one of them now, part of the extended Hornsey family. Laura began her top to bottom with Niña and her room under the stairs.....

“Morning Niña, is the security system now perfect ?” Asked Laura.

It seemed Simon had wanted cameras inside the house, but Clara had insisted that everyone had a right to privacy, including vampires. The monitors on the wall showed the outside of the house, the back garden and all around the house, but not the inside of the house.

“Completely perfect.....Hacker Jim did a brilliant job.” Said Niña. “There’s even a record function, so we can take a good look at something when we’ve got time.”

Laura was still a little wary of the young vampire girl. It was the lack of any common background and the girl’s rather eccentric vocabulary. A mixture of modern words from social media, combined with ancient speak, from the age of the Medici. A kind of Doctor Who meets Twilight. And yes, Niña had discovered the dubious delights of Twitter.

“The police are just two or three streets away.” Said Niña. “I saw them when I went out for milk. They’re going door to door, asking about the missing people.”

“Yes, Ronnie has seen them gradually getting closer.” Said Laura. “Had to happen eventually.....Shouldn’t be a problem, all purely routine.”

"I can't talk to them." Said Niña. "Clara told me I'm not properly acclimatised to the twenty first century. I think she means all the weird things I say. I do try, Laura.....But she's right, I shouldn't talk to the Van Helsings."

"You're getting better every day." Said Laura. "Probably best if I talk to them when they call. I'm still the official owner of the property and I'm on the electoral register, the list of people registered to vote at elections."

Niña gave her a puzzled look; it was more weird twenty first century vocabulary. The girl would look it up on the net, hurrah for Google, and would soon be an expert on the voting system. Ronnie was out, but there was a quick wave to Jim. He was in the lounge, watching something on TV.

"Everything alright, Jim?" Asked Laura.

"Fine."

No point of going top to bottom, if she missed anywhere. Laura took a quick look in the cellar and there was even the smell of fresh blood. The Van Helsings would go crazy if they smelled the blood and saw the sedated junkie on the floor. He was Clara's next meal and it had been Tim's idea to grab an emaciated drug addict off the street. Laura knew that all blood was good blood. If Tim wanted to ease his conscience a little.....Laura was just glad that Clara was needing less blood now. Hunting in North London had become far too risky.

"Maybe Tim was right.....Maybe we are doing the junkie a favour?" Muttered Laura.

His right wrist was chained to the wall, but the man was still fast asleep. Laura checked the chain was secure and left the cellar. Next stop would be the upstairs of the house, particularly the bedroom she shared with Tim Chance. On the way she passed Mabina on the stairs.

"Don't go to see Clara, she's with him again." Said Mabina. "Daniel.....All the time everything is Daniel this and Daniel that. I'm fed up with hearing his name."

"She has mummy crush on him, he did bring her baby into the world." Said Laura. "It'll soon wear off when Daniel annoys her, which he will."

"I hope you're right.....He's insufferable."

Laura opened her bedroom door carefully, Tim was still fast asleep. He was frantically active at night, but like a dormouse during the day. Van-Lag they were calling it, the cumulative effect of being out all night in her van, hunting for unwilling blood donors. Laura had shrugged it off; vampires could survive with very little sleep. Tim though.....

"Ahhh.....My darling, my dormouse." She muttered.

Laura kissed him very gently on the forehead and stood there for a moment, looking down at him. There had been talk of marriage, but that meant paperwork, which was always a bad idea. Try explaining to a government official why some of your identity documents say you were born hundreds of years ago. Laura was still only a few years on from Simon turning her, which was why she'd been made the owner of the Hornsey house. Time moved on though, with frightening speed.

"No....Marriage would be an unnecessary complication." She mumbled.

She did love him, all the weird feelings in her tummy, hating it if they were apart for just a few days. All the classis signs that for one reason or another, she loved Tim. He'd been hurt a few times and she'd felt every wound, as though it had been in her own body. For about the thousandth time, Laura realised their relationship was unsustainable.....Something had to happen. She either talked him into becoming a vampire, knowing that the attempt might kill him. Or, she'd have to suffer the pain of letting him go. The idea of him reaching his three score and ten, while she still looked in her early twenties. The thought of watching him die of old age.

"We need to resolve this whole love thing." Laura mumbled. "One way or another."

A last look at her sleeping lover and Laura looked in the spare bedroom, which had largely been gutted of furniture. Before the next set of stairs, several wardrobes had been placed in a row. Behind the wardrobes was a chair where Noah would sit, with a large machete in his right hand. Laura almost felt sorry for any occultist who tried to get past Noah. Where was Noah? Laura assumed Clara had sent him out on yet another errand.

"She has to stop doing that." Laura muttered.

Up more stairs and Noah was forgiven. There he was stood outside the nursery door, looking tall, strong and very formidable. The machete he seemed to carry everywhere, hung from his wrist on a leather strap.

"Wow, at least someone looks ready for battle." Said Laura.

"No one is going to grab her baby, not while I'm around." Said Noah.

The job had to be done properly; Laura looked in the cupboards on that floor and the large cupboard, which could double as another spare bedroom. No occultists waiting to pounce, just the slightly musty smell of a room that was rarely used.

"Do you really think we might be attacked?" Asked Noah.

"Definitely and probably at around four am, one morning." Said Laura. "The chronically sick in hospitals tend to pass away at four in the morning. It's when our circadian rhythm reaches its lowest point. We're at our lowest ebb then and the least able to deal with an emergency."

"Sounds like a time to get a jug of coffee." Said Noah.

"Tim drinks tins of Red Bull." Said Laura. "Huge amounts of it, probably too much."

Last part of the top to bottom, or bottom to top. Into the nursery and Clara was still in the large, hospital style bed. She'd showered and changed her nightwear a few times, but she still looked a little unwell. Having a child must have taken it out of her, in ways no one understood. Clara wanted to sleep there though, next to where Justin slept in his crib. No tubes connected to the tiny baby, no need for the incubator. As far as Daniel and Mabina could tell, Justin was as fit and healthy as any other miracle birth.

"Oh, sorry.....I'll come back later." Said Laura.

"No, come in.....Daniel is almost finished." Said Clara.

Clara was lying on the bed and naked, apart from a pair of knickers. There was a cannula in her arm and Daniel seemed to have just filled several sample tubes with Clara's blood. The shocking thing was that Clara was using a breast pump to get milk for her baby and the milk was bright red, as red as fresh blood. Laura must have been caught staring.

"Yes, Laura.....Blood. What else would my child feed on?"

"To be honest, I hadn't really thought about it." Said Laura.

"Not totally blood, there are other constituents to Clara's mother's milk." Said Daniel. "I know people in London who have laboratories. I'm calling in a few favours to have the milk tested."

"The more we know, the better we can look after Justin." Said Clara. "Daniel is sending my blood off too, for the lab to have a look at it. I'm beginning to feel like some kind of experiment."

"As far as the lab will know, Clara.....You are a strange experiment." Said Daniel.

Bright red milk, Laura was curious to see Justin drink it direct from Clara's breast. Everything was strange with the child, but he was likely to be the one and only baby ever to be given birth by a vampire. Not just unique, he had to be powerful, dark and totally unholy.

"If it's alright.....Can I watch him feed?" Asked Laura.

"Not now, my breasts are sore from the damned pump." Said Clara. "Later tonight though.....You can watch my son feed from me."

"There's fresh blood in the cellar, when you need it." Said Laura.

"Thank you Laura." Said Clara. "I wouldn't have survived without you and Tim hunting for me, just about every night of the week. I do appreciate it.....Tell Tim I appreciate it."

"I will."

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### ~ The Van Helsings come calling ~

Five days after the birth and a certain normality was returning to the Hornsey house. Clara was sitting in the lounge quite a lot, with Justin in a carrycot. Everyone had been encouraged to hold the baby and everyone had. Justin Ned Atherton the vampire child, had been a nebulous idea for most, until they held the miracle in their arms. To feel his weight, to see him smile with those wonderful green eyes. Best of all was the smell of new baby, which was the most wonderful smell in the world. Even Laura had been affected by Clara's tiny baby. When the attack came, they'd be fighting to protect a real child, not a nebulous idea.....

"They're almost here, just two houses away." Said Niña.

The Van Helsings, the police, had reached their street. Just a minibus with police markings and three or four uniformed officers, but to Laura....It felt like they were surrounded by some kind of old enemy. Ronnie was looking through a gap in the curtains.

"They all look so young these days." Said Ronnie. "The woman cop heading our way.....She looks about sixteen."

"They're not getting younger, we're getting older." Said Jim.

"The Visigoths are at the gates." Muttered Laura.

Laura didn't usually mutter about ancient Rome, but Tim had lately joined the online obsession with Roman history. It seemed to be a guy thing, but Laura had absorbed a lot of it, by simply being around him.

"Just relax, Laura." Said Clara. "It's all purely routine and the police officers are likely to be trainees. Just answer the door when they ring and tell them we've seen nothing strange."

Ronnie actually laughed at that comment, but on the whole; everyone was looking a bit nervous. As the doorbell rang, Niña actually gave a quiet gasp.

"Here we go." Said Laura.

Along a short hallway past the kitchen and Laura opened the heavy front door. In front of her was the woman police officer Ronnie had commented on. Close up, she still looked about sixteen. With her was a very tall and thin young man. He looked as though he wasn't used to wearing a police uniform. The woman was shuffling a few pages of printed information.

"Sorry to bother you." Said the woman. "As you may have heard, we're canvassing this borough, in the hope of obtaining information on several missing people."

"I heard about that on the radio." Said Laura. "Dreadful.....The radio mentioned over twenty are missing."

"Yes, really dreadful." Said the man.

Actually it was more than twenty, but people like the junkie tend not to be missed. Laura was nervous, because her killing of a senior cop had begun in a similar way. A routine call because she'd bought a vehicle with a history. It had been owned by the wife of a particularly unpleasant North London hoodlum. Laura had sort of known about it, but hadn't expected a visit by the cops. One of them had been curious about her and started digging.....He'd ended up dead by her hands. Luckily someone else had been the key suspect and as she too had died.....

"I have a few names for this address." Said the woman. "Could I have your name please?"



“Yes, of course.....I’m Laura Selway. I should be on your list.”

That part of Hornsey had a high turnover of people owning and renting properties. Laura knew the neighbours just down the hill, but the other side.....She’d barely noticed them. The woman cop smiled and Laura knew she’d found her on the list.

“Wonderful.....You’re on our list.” Said the woman. “You’d be amazed how many aren’t.”

“Makes our job harder.” Said the man.

One day identity cards would be mentioned again by the government of the day, and Laura was dreading that. To a vampire, compulsory ID wasn’t an insurmountable problem, but it was a nuisance.

“We’re asking everyone if they’ve seen, or noticed anything strange.” Said the woman. “Mainly in the last few months. Maybe you noticed someone who was usually around, suddenly wasn’t there anymore. Cars too and vans, maybe you noticed the same vehicle, night after night.....But have no idea who owns it. Those are just a few idea.....Have you noticed anything strange ?”

Laura heard the words and wondered about her van. Now she was changing the plates every few nights, but she hadn’t been doing that for long. Was her van a time bomb, waiting for an observant little old lady to mention it to the police ? Laura recovered her focus, but there was Clara, complete with baby Justin held in her arms.

“I must be on your list..... Clara Copley.”

It was like magic, the way the woman cop beamed when she saw Justin. The man wasn’t immune to baby charisma either; he seemed to only have eyes for Clara’s child.

“This is Justin.....I don’t think he’ll be on any lists, no yet anyway.” Said Clara.

“Ahhhhh, he’s adorable.” Said the woman.

“Less than a week old and already keeping us all awake at night.” Said Clara. “I hope us moving the nursery around, hasn’t annoyed the neighbours ?”

“No, we’re here to ask about the unexplained disappearances.” Said the man.

“Yes, of course.....Dreadful.” Said Clara.

Justin was called adorable many more times and the missing people problem was referred to as dreadful, quite a few times. Laura said she hadn’t noticed anything strange in the area and the two young cops left. They headed down the hill to annoy the Johar family.

“Thank you for some timely help.” Said Laura. “I never realised babies are a secret weapon.”

“Better than a squad of marines.” Said Clara. “Hopefully.....The Van Helsing’s won’t be back.”

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### ~ **Outside in the back garden** ~

The morning after the visit by the police and Clara had been informed by Noah, that there was a problem with one of the lounge windows. Noah had begun to walk the wire as he called it, to go right around the house at first light, making sure nothing had been interfered with. Niña was embarrassed, she was supposed to be their own version of GCHQ and MI5, all rolled into one.

“No recriminations, no witch hunt.” Said Clara. “But.....We need to know why your security system didn’t see this happen.”

“I’ll look at last night’s recordings and find out what happened.” Said Niña.

Noah was there of course, he’d discovered the damage. Ronnie was there, examining the window frame and very briefly, Hacker Jim had joined in. The three of them together, with no threats, no abuse, no one getting punched. Maybe Noah had learned how not to hold a grudge. Clara had left Justin with Daniel, to come and look at the window. It was relatively new, installed as part of Simon’s attempt to spruce up the house a little. Clara remembered it was supposed to be fairly burglar proof.

“Ok, firstly.....Is this new damage ?” Asked Clara.

“Yes, there are tiny pieces of debris on the ground.” Said Ronnie. “The first shower and that will be washed away.”

“This happened last night.” Said Noah.

He said it with a quiet authority, that no one felt able to naysay. Noah pointed at a section of the expensive window, where something had been jammed between the window and the frame.

“They used a flat ended screwdriver, or something similar.” Said Noah. “This wasn’t an attempt to break in, it was a test.....They were seeing how tough the windows are, before they break in. If I hadn’t started walking the wire every morning, we’ve have never known about it.”

“Will the windows withstand an attack ?” Asked Ronnie.

“A concerted attack.....No.” Said Noah. “A few masked intruders armed with something heavy.....No domestic windows can withstand that. Five minutes at the most and they’ll be in. They now know our windows might look good, but they’re not that tough.”

“How about the noise ? The neighbours will call the cops.” Said Ronnie.

“They’re after my son.” Said Clara. “Nothing else worries them, especially a few unarmed coppers.”

Niña returned holding a tablet, which Jim had linked into the security system. The girl was really settling into the modern world. Clara was beginning to wonder if she’d want to go home, even if there was a way to send her.

“You have to see this.” Said Niña. “Impossible really, but everything was recorded.”

There it was on the screen, a shadow. It didn’t even have the shape of a human, yet the formless shadow seemed to be holding a screwdriver. It dug the blade into the window frame and began a thrusting action. Satisfied it had learned what it needed to learn, the shadow vanished.

“Wow, anyone know what that was ?” Asked Ronnie.

“Not only witches have familiars, occultists use them too.” Said Clara. “Not all familiars are flesh and blood animals, some are elementals. We’ve just seen an air elemental, testing the strength of our windows.”

“Are they dangerous ?” Asked Noah.

“Depends.....Angry fire elementals need to be treated with care.” Said Clara. “We’ve hired some of your old army chums before, Noah. That was for Cyril, but I’ll pay them well. I’d say we need four, or five, though a round half dozen would be fine. Can you make a few calls ?”

“Yes, I’ll get on the phone right away.” Said Noah. “They’ll need camp beds and bedding.....Plus they’ll need feeding.”

“I can take care of all that.” Said Niña.

“We’ll make them comfortable.” Said Clara. “One thing.....No firearms, but we have a lot of very good swords, battle axes and war hammers. I can see your friends quite enjoying swinging an axe, or a long sword.”

“So can I, Clara.....So can I.” Said Noah.

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