

THIRTY DAYS

by

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(for NaNoWriMo 2010)

I am writing 'Thirty Days' for National Novel Writing Month 2010. I am also writing it to raise money for charity. The specific charity that I want to help is St Luke's Hospice (Harrow and Brent). They provide care and support to terminally ill patients and their families from the Harrow and Brent areas of north London, regardless of their background. In May 2009 my father sadly passed away, but his final days were made more comfortable by St Luke's, and I'm grateful for the care that they gave him and the support that they gave to my family. And so I would like to raise some money for them as my way of saying thanks. You can find out more about St Luke's via their website at www.stlukes-hospice.org

If you would like to sponsor me you can do so via my Just Giving page at www.justgiving.com/karlsgreen I and St Luke's will be grateful for anything that you're able to give.

And finally, I've also set up a page on Facebook about the novel where I'll be posting any news about what I'm doing, and you can find it at <http://bit.ly/9OfC6p>

This file, and all other chapters, will be made available on my website at <http://www.karlsgreen.co.uk/thirtydays> You may freely distribute this file subject to the following two conditions:

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DAY TEN

NATASHA'S STRENGTH

She went with the man when he next confronted the others in his society about his ideas about his world and its place within the heavens. She had convinced him, or so she thought, that he should face them again, and outline the evidence that he had for his views. That, by being calm and explaining things carefully, he would be able to convince at least some of them. Once he had some others that believed what it was that he had to say, they would then be able to support him as he tried to convince the rest. She said that she would come with him and help him as he did this.

She had looked into the Etiria when she gave this advice. However, it didn't appear to be working as well as it normally did. The images it showed were murky, cloudy. But they did appear to show that this course of action would help the man, that he would be successful in convincing some of the others, and so she gave him her advice.

On the evening before they were to face the people she went to his house so that they could prepare what it was they were going to say. As she entered he advised her that he had prepared some charts in his basement, and so he led her to it.

However, there were no charts in the basement. As soon as she stepped inside he snapped a large bracelet onto her wrist, and then closed and locked the door to the basement.

She was confused – this was not what the Etiria had shown her. She couldn't get out of the room – she couldn't force the door open, and there were no windows. She then tried to use her powers to try and escape from this world, but they, too, failed her.

She then looked at the bracelet, and saw that it was not of a design of this world. She attempted to remove it, but found that she could not.

She was trapped and there was nothing that she could do, but wait.

The Other was getting closer...

The Apocolynium – X

Natasha had had a long and tiring day at work on the tenth day. She felt that this week was really dragging on. Work had been slow and tedious as she had been tasked to carry out a repetitive task on Excel for much of the day. But she was already tired before she went to work that day. Her NaNoWriMo novel was tiring her out, and she had slipped behind target. By the end of the day she needed to be on 16,667 words if she was to be on target for reaching 50,000 words by the end of the month. However, she had only managed to crawl up to around 13,500 words, and she wasn't feeling up to sitting at her computer tonight to write the 3,000 or so words that she needed in order to catch up. In fact, she didn't think she could even manage 1,000 words, and 500 words seemed too hard to do as well.

That day she had also been concerned about the dream that she had had last night, which had resulted in her not getting sufficient sleep. She could still remember the face that she had seen in her dream, and it terrified her. The dream just did not make any sense to her, and she didn't know why she had dreamed it. I believe that it was the fact that the Dragon Keeper knew where she was, and was reaching out to her.

As she got in from work she put her bag down in the hall and went into her living room where she turned on her TV. It came on straight away to the BBC News channel which had further coverage about the student protests that had taken place in central London earlier that day. The student's were protesting about the government's plans to increase tuition fees, but some of the protests had started to turn violent. She had seen some of the news stories via the web whilst she was at work. Whilst she agreed that the government shouldn't increase tuition fees, and certainly not by as much as had been proposed, she still felt that protesting about it in a violent manner wasn't going to be doing anyone any favours.

She then went into her kitchen, when she got a very nasty shock. On one of the work surfaces in her kitchen someone had spread out what looked to be a whole packet of sugar. In the sugar they had written a message: 'DESTINY WILL FALL. BE PREPARED.' Not only had someone been sending her text messages and posting notes through her door, they had now broken into her flat and left a message for her there. She was in her own home, but now she didn't feel safe there.

She turned and ran out of her flat and went downstairs to Tom's flat in a panic. She knocked frantically on the door, and it was Lisa who came to answer it. 'What's wrong?' she asked when she saw the quite obviously frightened Natasha.

'Someone's been in my flat! Whilst I was out, someone's broken in!'

'Oh no, did they steal anything?'

'No – I don't know – but they left me a message in my kitchen.'

'Do you mind if I come up and take a look at it?'

Natasha shook her head, and she led Lisa upstairs. Lisa had her suspicions as to where the message may have come from, and if she was right then, she, too, would have been very afraid.

They went into Natasha's kitchen, and Lisa saw the message. It was not what she was expecting. I'm unable to tell quite what it was she was expecting to find, but this was not it. She certainly felt that the words 'DESTINY WILL FALL' were very ominous, and they worried her. They worried her a lot.

She placed her hand over the message, presumably to see if she could pick up some trace as to where it might have come from, but she was unable to detect anything.

Lisa asked her, 'Do you know who might have done this?'

'No, but it's not the first time something like this has happened. I've had text messages with similar messages, and I've also had these...' She went off to get the leaflets that had been posted to her, and then showed them to Lisa.

'This is very worrying...' said Lisa.

'Can I call the police from your place? I don't feel very safe here.'

'Yes, yes of course...' Lisa was apprehensive about allowing the police to get involved. Whilst she didn't know who it was that was behind these messages, she was able to tell that it was not the work of any Earthly being. However, she couldn't very well tell Natasha that, or to tell her not to call the police – obviously she would want, and need, to call them.

They went back down to Tom's flat, and Natasha called the police. They came round relatively quickly. They took a statement from Natasha, and had a thorough look around her flat. They got her to confirm that nothing had been taken. Oddly, they could find no trace of a forced entry. They also dusted down her kitchen to look for fingerprints, but they could find none.

Once they were done she asked, 'So, what happens next.'

One of the police officers dealing with it said, 'We'll put everything on file, and we'll keep an eye out for anything suspicious. If you get any more of these messages send them straight to us. But until we have something a bit more solid to go on there's not much we can do. We'll contact your mobile phone company though to see if we can trace those text messages. But the chances are that they'll be sent from a throwaway pay-as-you-go phone.'

'Thanks...' She knew that the police were doing all that they could do, but they at least needed something to go on before they could actually do anything.

She still didn't feel safe – she knew (or, rather, believed) that someone had been inside her flat whilst she had been out at work. She asked Lisa if she could stay with her in Tom's flat for a while longer, which Lisa said was fine.

Shortly after the police had left Tom came home from work, and Natasha told him what had happened.

'That is scary!' was his initial reaction. If someone had got into the building and broke into her flat, then they could have just as easily have got into his. He then said, 'Look, if you don't feel safe staying in your own flat tonight you'd be welcome to stay here if you like.' He then turned to Lisa and said, 'That is, if you don't mind sharing the bed in the spare bedroom.' The bed happened to be a double bed, and so he felt there would be sufficient room for them.

'That's fine,' said Lisa.

‘Thanks Tom, I’ll do that.’ She knew that this meant that she was going to fall further behind on her novel, but right now that was the least of her worries.

Tom then said, ‘Right, that’s settled then. Now, I don’t know about how you two feel, but I don’t feel like cooking tonight. I say we order in some pizzas. What do you say? My shout.’

They agreed. Once Tom had their orders he went off to call one of the local pizza delivery companies. Natasha then said to Lisa, ‘I’d like to get a few things from my flat. Would you come with me? I don’t want to go there on my own.’

‘Yes, of course.’

They went back up to Natasha’s flat, where she started to pack an overnight bag. ‘I could really do without this stress at the moment,’ she said.

‘Oh right, how come?’

‘I’m just completely shattered. Work’s been a bit of a drag and I just want this week to be over. Plus I’m also doing this novel writing thing.’

‘Oh yes, what’s that?’

Natasha then proceeded to tell Lisa all about NaNoWriMo, and the fact that she was already behind on her word count, but wasn’t feeling up to writing any of it tonight.

‘That does sound really tough. Why are you putting yourself through it?’

‘Well, I’ve always wanted to be a writer, and I thought that this would be a good way of getting a first draft down on paper. There are loads of other people doing it as well, and the London lot are really nice people. They’ve got quite an active forum on the NaNoWriMo website, and a lot of them are quite active on Twitter as well. Although there is this one maniac who’s going for 150,000 words this year. The last time I checked he was on about 46,500 words, and so he might pass the official 50,000 word winners line tonight.’

‘Gosh, that is fast! Not to mention insane...’

‘Yeah, but he’s not alone, there are already people who have gone over 50,000 words already. I don’t know how they all do it. I’ll just be glad if I can make it to 50,000 words by the end of the month, but that now looks like it’s going to be too hard for me to do.’

‘Nonsense, you can still do it, if you put your mind to it. Don’t worry about it tonight, you clearly have far more important concerns. See how you feel tomorrow, and, if you feel up to it, just get your bum on a seat and get on with it. You said you were already on 13,500 words. That means that you’ve got 36,500 words to go. And you’ll be able to do that if you can just do 1,825 words per day. That’s the way to go about it – don’t try and catch up to where you should be all in one go, as that will just tire you out and you’ll get nowhere, and you’ll end up writing even less

in the long run. Never forget the story of the tortoise and the hare – slow and steady wins the race.’

‘Yeah, you’re right, I hadn’t thought about it like that.’ And she hadn’t. Only having to do 1,825 words per day sounded a lot better than being over 3,000 words behind by the end of today. As long as she got a good night’s sleep tonight, and no one else tried to break in to either her flat or Tom’s, then she might just be able to face going back to the novel tomorrow.

Once she had packed her things for the night she and Lisa went back downstairs. They went into Tom’s living room where they watched TV as they waited for their pizzas to arrive. Despite what had happened regarding her flat today, Natasha was feeling a little better now. She felt happy to be around some other people. It reminded her a little bit of what it was like when she was back at Uni. After Uni she had lived with her parents for a bit before she was able to afford her own place, although it was only a shared ownership property. She had bought half of it with a combination of savings and a mortgage, and she paid rent on the other half. It wasn’t ideal, but it was good to be able to get at least one foot onto the property ladder, even if the other one was still firmly on the ground. It was nice to finally have her own place – at least, when it wasn’t being broken into.

At first she was happy to have her own place. Things were getting a little cramped at her parent’s house. She liked the extra space that having her own place meant, and the freedom that came with living on her own. True, she also had to do all of her own washing, cleaning, and cooking, but that wasn’t too onerous a task. But there were times when she missed having the company of others when she was in the flat on her own.

Back when she was at Uni she always had some of her friends around her. She was hardly ever alone. Whenever she had any problems, whether it was to do with an essay, or a boyfriend, or something going wrong with her computer, there was always someone there for her to turn to. Nowadays that wasn’t always the case. Tom had still been out of work when she had come home that day. If Lisa hadn’t been staying with him then she wouldn’t have had anyone else that she knew to turn to – she’d never met the other residents in her building. True, she could have called her parents, but they lived on the other side of Harrow, and she didn’t like to bother them if she could help it. Her dad would probably overly fuss about it, and create more hassles than there were before, and her mum was likely to worry far too much about her – she had always been worried ever since she had moved out of home.

But it wasn’t just having someone to turn to when she had a problem that she missed. She missed the nights at Uni when she didn’t have any work to do and she could just hang out with

her mates. They didn't always have to go out on such nights, sometimes it was just nice to stay indoors and just watch TV together. Which is why this night now reminded her of those nights.

It was very cold outside today, but Tom had his heating on and it was comfortably warm in his flat. He also had soft lighting on in there, and, overall, the place felt rather cosy, and this all helped to make Natasha feel happy, and to almost forget about what had happened to her own flat.

Before too long Tom's entry phone rang. He got up to answer it, and, as it expected, it was the pizza delivery man. He pressed the buzzer to let him into the building, and then he went to his front door and got his money ready to pay him.

However, this was no ordinary pizza delivery man. To Tom he would look perfectly normal, but he was anything but. He was, in fact, Welt in disguise.

Yes, the Dragon Keeper had indeed located where in London Natasha was. But before she took any action regarding her she felt that she needed to find out more about her. There was only so much that she could do through Claire's computer, and through her own powers. And so she had devised a plan that would enable her to get Natasha under her control, to keep her in one place so that she could go and collect her essence, and to keep her from going anywhere near the other half.

Using her powers she had created an artefact, but one that was so small it could hardly be perceived. But she needed to find a way to get this artefact to enter Natasha's body. She herself couldn't risk going near Natasha's flat because she also knew that Lisa was there. If she got too close to her she might have alarmed her and all would be lost. She had considered going towards Natasha's place of work, but she had no feasible excuse for entering her building. And as for a random encounter on a train, whilst that may have worked she felt that the electricity used on the tracks between Harrow & Wealdstone and Stonebridge Park may have prevented the artefact from properly attaching itself to Natasha. In order for it to work properly it needed to avoid electrical interference, and it also helped if Natasha herself were relaxed. She had detected that Natasha had been feeling a lot of stress today, but, now that she was relaxing in Tom's flat, the conditions were now right for the artefact to be deployed.

As she couldn't go to Natasha's building herself for fear of Lisa detecting her, she had to send someone else instead, and the only person that was available to her was Welt. Using Claire's computer she had been able to tap into the phone lines at Natasha's building. She had heard the call to the police regarding someone breaking into Natasha's flat. Whilst this did intrigue her, she was none the wiser as to who was responsible for it as you or I are. But when she then heard

Tom make the call to order the pizza, combined with Natasha's falling stress levels, she quickly moved into action.

She informed Welt that she would be teleporting him to a location just outside the pizza delivery place that Tom had called. He was to observe it, and, using the powers that he had been granted when he had arrived on Earth (which the Dragon Keeper had instructed him how to use) once he identified the delivery that was due to go to Tom's flat he was to intercept the driver and place him in a trance. Once this was done, he was to change into his clothes and deliver the pizzas himself. She could sense that it would be Tom answering the door, and not Lisa or Natasha. At the same time, he was to place the artefact inside Tom's flat, and then activate it. He would then need to return to the driver with the money and take him out of the trance, leaving him with the impression that nothing unusual had happened – she didn't want to risk raising the alarm.

And so now Welt found himself at Tom's flat delivering his pizzas. As soon as he had handed the pizzas over to him he let go of the artefact that he had been holding in his other hand. It rolled into Tom's flat. He then looked at it, and, using his powers, he was able to activate it. Once he had Tom's money and given him his change, he left the building and followed the rest of the Dragon Keeper's instructions.

Tom went back into his living room, where both Natasha and Lisa were prepared to start eating the pizzas. Meanwhile, the artefact slowly rolled towards Tom's living room.

As I have said, it was very small. It looked like a silver ball bearing, and was about one twentieth the size of an average pea. The Dragon Keeper had designed it to seek out Natasha and attach itself to her – it was able to detect the power that Natasha had in the same way that the program on Claire's computer was able to.

As soon as Welt had activated it, it was able to locate where Natasha was and started moving towards her. It moved at a very slow rate so that it could avoid detection – I'm sure that there may have been times in your life where you have detected something moving in the corner of your eye, and then you turn to look at it and see that it is a spider or a moth or some other such creature. Imagine how Tom, Natasha, or Lisa would have felt if they had spotted a ball bearing apparently moving of its own violation?

The artefact slowly moved towards Natasha. It eventually started to roll up the back of the chair that she was sitting in. It then moved onto her shoulder, and continued to slowly move up it until it reached her neck. It then waited for a moment when she would be distracted.

Tom asked Lisa, 'How's your search for your old friends going?'

'Not too bad, but it's probably going to take awhile.'

‘Do you know how long you’re going to be around for? Don’t worry, I’m not planning on kicking you out or anything! You’re more than welcome to stay here for as long as you like.’ He secretly thought to himself that she was more than welcome to stay here forever.

Natasha was looking at Tom when he said this, and she understood. She could see the look of love that was in his eyes. The poor boy was clearly besotted with Lisa. As she looked at Lisa she couldn’t see any indication that she would reciprocate Tom’s feelings for her.

Whilst this was going on the artefact took its chance, and quickly moved up Natasha’s neck, and into her ear, where it then proceeded to make its way through her head until it could access her brain. She barely noticed this at all. She felt a slight tickling sensation in her ear, but thought little of it. She was completely unaware of the fact that the payload had been delivered.

From Natasha’s perspective the rest of the evening went well. They watched TV, chatted, and she felt generally relaxed and happy, and was virtually able to forget about what had happened in her flat earlier.

As she got into bed Lisa asked her, ‘Are you sure everything’s OK with you?’

‘Yeah, I’ll be fine, thanks.’

Lisa still had her concerns. She knew that the Dragon Keeper was coming for Natasha, but she was oblivious as to what it was she was planning. She was also concerned about the messages that had been sent to Natasha, who it was that might have been sending them. And those words, ‘DESTINY WILL FALL’, they especially worried her. They worried her a lot.

Natasha found that she was able to fall asleep fairly easily, far easier than she was used to. Pretty much as soon as she was asleep she started dreaming. She once again dreamt about the same face that had appeared in her dream last night, the face of the Dragon Keeper. It started saying, ‘Sleep, Natasha, sleep. Sleep all night long. And then sleep all day tomorrow, and forever! Sleep forever and never wake up! Never, never, never! Sleep, Natasha. Sleep and be free. You need never wake again. Have no more worries, no more fears, just sleep. Long, eternal, sleep!’ She laughed, manically, and moved away from view.

Natasha then realised that this was no normal dream. She was able to think clearly in this one. She was able to think as clearly as she would be able to if she were fully awake. And she knew that she was in danger.

She tried to force herself awake, but found that she couldn’t. She knew that she was still asleep and that she had to wake up, but she just couldn’t do so. The Dragon Keeper continued to laugh.

Natasha knew that that face was what was preventing her from waking. She moved the consciousness within her mind towards that face so that she could see it again. 'Who are you?' she asked.

'I am the one who is going to keep you here forever. You can forget about ever finding the other half and saving your world. You are my prisoner and I shall not permit you to escape. Oh, and don't think that Lisa will be able to help you. Not even she can save you from this.'

'What do you know about Lisa?'

The Dragon Keeper looked at her inquisitively, and then started to laugh again. 'Oh, this is good! This is fantastic! You don't even know who she really is! Good old Lisa. It doesn't matter now, you don't ever need to know who she truly is. She has failed to protect you. Soon you will be mine, and there is nothing that she can do to save you.'

Natasha knew that she was in severe danger, and that she was on her own. She didn't know what was happening, but she knew that she had to do something. But what? How do you fight a dream?

She then felt a strength rise up inside of her. Within her mind her consciousness seemed to grow, until it was much larger than that of the Dragon Keepers.

She then looked down on the Dragon Keeper and said, 'I don't know who you are, where you've come from, or what you want. But you will NOT keep me here! Get out of my head!' And with that she pictured in her mind lifting a gigantic foot, and stepping down on the Dragon Keeper. The Dragon Keeper screamed. Natasha could feel her under her foot, writhing, trying to get out from under it. She just pressed down harder and harder and harder, until her foot came all the way down to the ground, and then the Dragon Keeper was gone.

Once her foot came into contact with the ground (or what passed for it in this dream state) Natasha felt herself getting lighter and lifting up, up far above where she had been before.

Back in the real world she slowly opened her eyes as she awoke from her dream. She had never been so relieved to wake up before in all of her life.

She could feel some wetness by her ear. She sat up, and turned on one of the bedside lamps. She turned around and saw that there was a little pool of blood where her ear had been. In the centre of that pool was what looked like a ball bearing. The artefact had exited the same way that it had come in.

Lisa (who had only faked being asleep, being that she was one who didn't require sleep) also sat up and looked at this pool of blood, and at the artefact. She picked it up and examined it, and suddenly realised what it was that had happened. The Dragon Keeper had somehow been able to

get to Natasha. She knew exactly where she was and had been able to reach out and attack her. And Lisa was ashamed of herself for not having been able to do anything about it.

She then looked at Natasha, who was looking at her with a confused expression on her face. Natasha had faced the danger of the Dragon Keeper alone, and, amazingly, she had defeated her. Natasha truly did possess an extraordinary power and strength if she was able to do that.

Natasha looked at Lisa, and thought back to what the Dragon Keeper had said to her. She had implied that Lisa was somehow not who she seemed to be. That she was somehow meant to protect her, but had failed to do so. It was then that she really noticed just how young she did look. If she didn't know better she would have sworn that Lisa couldn't possibly have been any older than 18. But that was impossible. She had gone to college with Tom 15 years ago, which would place her in her thirties at the very least. Nobody, nobody at all, could possibly look as youthful at 30 as Lisa did now.

Natasha then said, 'Lisa, who *are* you?' She didn't feel threatened by her, but she knew that there was something going on here, something big, something that involved her, and that Lisa was somehow a part of this.

Lisa just leant towards her and hugged her, and Natasha hugged her back. Lisa then said, 'I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry. I wish that this wasn't happening to you. I wish that this didn't have to be. And I'm sorry that you had to face her on your own like that. I should have stopped that from happening, but she got through. I'm sorry, Natasha, I'm so sorry.' She then let go of her.

Natasha slowly tried to take in what she was saying. She still found it a little hard to believe just what exactly was going on. She then looked at Lisa and said, 'Tell me everything.'

Lisa took a deep breath, and then began.