

TEMPORARY VISITORS

They were two very young people. Just children, really. Even so, they had not been accompanied by any adults as they arrived by train late in the small hours. Now they had stopped just outside the main entrance of the station building, stood there looking around. They had never been at this place before, but that was the way it almost always was. Yet this city did not differ significantly from the other cities they had visited. There were houses and there were streets. The houses were dark and the streets deserted. The last entertainment establishments had closed and their guests had gone home hours earlier, and the morning crowds of people would not fill the streets in yet a couple of hours. The city was asleep.

After a few seconds one of the two made a gesture, said:

"That way?"

The other threw a glance in the pointed direction, nodded a silent approval and so they left. They crossed the plane in front of the station and entered one of the streets on the other side. They walked at a brisk pace, their sports bags swinging in the shoulder straps, bumping at their hips. They looked around as they walked, stopped at street intersections, pointed and exchanged a few words before they continued, or departed in a new direction.

They were searching for a place to stay. They did not need much, just a reasonably flat and dry floor. Most of all they needed to be left alone, that no one would find them there. And it must be dark. No daylight was allowed to enter. Otherwise, they had no requirements.

But in all cities there are places that might suit them. Nooks and crannies, spaces that had been left over or forgotten. High up under the roofs in the attics, where the building style offered those, or down below, in the basements. Or yet further down, in the tunnels and culverts that pierce the ground in all cities.

Eventually they had found what they had been looking for: A locked door which, by all signs, had not been opened for a very long time. It was made of steel, the paint was dull of age and flaking here and there. They examined the lock, then one of them pulled a small case out of his bag while the other turned to keep watch. After a minute the two of them disappeared through the now opened door. They pulled it close, checked carefully that it was locked again. Then they explored the space on the other side, checking if there were any other entrances, if those had been used recently.

At dawn they returned to the nook they had chosen for their resting place. It was hidden behind a technical installation that had not been used for many years. They crept in there and lay down together on a pair of worn blankets they had spread out on the floor, wrestling for a while with them. When they were finished they lay close together, wrapped in the blankets. Like a chrysalis. Or a mummy.

They would stay there all day, unmoving in a dreamless torpor, barely alive. If anyone found them thus, they would not notice it, not until it was already too late. They knew this, and every dawn as they had wrapped themselves in their blankets they therefore held each other hard, as if those seconds before the rest took over were their very last together.

