

Ruby IV : Just A Shadow

Chapter 13 - Aden

“Ruby had no idea what religion the church belonged to, just that it was a Yemeni sect of one of them. Not that it mattered, final words said over someone, are final words. The language and Gods involved seemed immaterial.”

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Luca Lengyel didn't know Aden, it was her first visit to the temporary capital of Yemen. Max had told her the city had good days and bad days, but the bad ones tended to outweigh the good. Yemen had suffered from so many wars, that everyone seemed to view everyone they came across as a threat. At least that was Max's view, though Ruby hadn't been quite as negative.

“We're just passing through.” Ruby had told her that morning. “I'm not going to claim we can help anyone in Yemen. I just want to be able to say we didn't make things worse.”

It was a hot morning and Luca was treating the sick and wounded under a canvas cover on the foredeck of Max's patrol boat. There were a surprising number of minor wounds from the attack by pirates, shrapnel type wounds from flying debris. There were three dead, Anna and two of Max's crew. Luckily Kallina was able to use her skills to slow down decomposition. Luca was a little in awe of Kallina, who appeared to be a genuine bona fide witch. For a someone brought up under strict Polish Catholicism, witchcraft wasn't something generally talked about.

“Well, we've got a good view of Aden.” Said Lily Faria.

“It looks alright from here; I can even see a few yachts moored near the breakwater.” Said Luca. Max had said shit could kick off at any moment and he did know the city pretty well. Most of those with minor wounds had been treated, leaving Luca to examine Lily. For some reason a fairly minor injury to her knee was refusing to heal. It happened sometimes, especially with knees for some reason. Luca quite enjoyed treating wounds, she was good at it. She'd had a lot of experience treating wounds with Olga's gang, everything from gunshot injuries to the large slicing wounds by machetes. There were times though, when she wasn't ashamed to ask for help.

“Hmmm, I want you to walk properly, Lily.” She said. “You shouldn't still have a limp. I'd like to ask Kallina to look at it, if that's alright ?”

“I've seen what they can all do; my boss has files.” Said Lily. “If I get a choice ? I'd quite like Sophie to take a look.”

“Alright, Sophie it is.” Said Luca.

The boys were there, both had been given the once over, medically speaking. As far as Luca could tell without a lab to test blood and urine, they were both healthy young kids.

“Damu, Enki, please find Sophie.” Said Luca. “Say I need her help.”

It was uncanny, the way they seemed to know where people were on the boat. Both together, they hurtled off towards the rear of the boat.

“Nice kids, are they going with us past Yemen ?” Asked Lily.

“No, Todd knows people in Aden. A local couple who've worked for British intelligence a few times. Todd gave them a glowing reference. The boys are being left with them.” Said Luca. “Hence the not that thorough medical.”

“Not sure if I'd think of Aden as a safe place for them.”

“Aden is probably a hundred times safer than where we’re going.”

“You’ve got a point.” Said Lily.

Sophie didn’t dislike kids, but she definitely wasn’t the first to leap up if Monique needed someone to keep an eye on the boys. She’d be the first to admit to having few maternal feelings, yet the boys obviously doted on her. Damu was holding her hand, as they presented Sophie as some kind of trophy.

“We found her.” Said Enki.

“I was eating, but the little monsters refused to go away.” Said Sophie.

Even being called monsters didn’t stop their obvious joy of finding Sophie and bringing her to the makeshift medical room.

“Thanks for coming, Sophie.” Said Luca. “I’ve reached the need of a wunderkind second opinion, about Lily’s knee.”

“I’m not sure if I’m qualified. Now, if you wanted her knee blown up.....”

“Nonsense, I’ve seen your file.” Said Lily. “You have the least post healing complications.”

“A file indeed, can I see it ?” Asked Sophie.

“Yes, of course you can. When we return to London.”

“The dressing will need to come off.” Said Sophie.

They did it together, carefully removing the bandage from Lily’s problem knee. Sophie looked at the knee and even prodded it a little, until it was obviously causing Lily some pain. Then, quite bizarrely, Sophie sniffed at the raw area near Lily’s kneecap.

“It’s not infected, I can definitely tell you that.” Said Sophie. “I suspect there’s a tiny bullet fragment in there. I need to mark its location; do you have a marker pen ?”

Luca handed a marker to Sophie, thinking she was ready to use it. Unfortunately, it seemed poor Lily was in for a little more pain.

“I need to make the metal vibrate.” Said Sophie. “Sorry, this might sting a bit.”

Lily winced, while Sophie ran her hand backwards and forwards over her knee. Then, after staring at the knee for a couple of minutes, Sophie jabbed with the marker, leaving a tiny blue dot.

“There, it’s in quite deep.” Said Sophie. “There’ll be medical facilities in Aden, or I could do it now. I’m assuming we have a strong local anaesthetic ? It’s Lily’s choice.”

“Do it now, get it out of me.” Said Lily.

Anaesthesia was one of Luca’s expert skills, mainly because she had so much experience. Sophie pointed at part of the knee, while she injected large amounts of the anaesthetic. Lily stopped wincing after about the third or fourth injection.

“That’s wonderful, no pain.” Said Lily. “It’s been keeping me awake.”

“I had no idea it was that bad.” Said Luca. “If you’d said, I could have given you something.”

“let’s do this.” Said Sophie. “You need to keep still, Lily. Even if it hurts, keep still.”

Luca held the leg, without making it too obvious that she was holding it down. Sophie ran her hands of the knee, while Lily watched.

“Ahh, I see something.” Said Lily. “A bulge, a definite bulge.”

“I have it.....It’ll all happen very fast now.” Said Sophie.

The bulge in the knee became a livid red spot, which became a bleeding hole. Lily did cry out as the piece of bullet left her leg, though that might have been the shock of seeing a piece of bullet coming out of her leg. Sophie was bouncing the metal fragment about on the palm of her hand.

“Can I keep this ?” Asked Sophie.

“No, I want it.” Said Lily. “It’ll be something to tell the grandchildren about.”

“I’ll put on a dressing and you’ll be ready to go.” Said Luca.

The London offices of the Polandrous Foundation were functioning again. Not everything was perfect, now it was the builders causing problems. George had arranged for them to come in and repair the damage.

“Just the major damage, Penny.” George had said. “We can do a full redecoration of the building next year. For now, let’s get everyone back in the office and settled.”

The builders were known, the owner used the same networking group as George. They’d repaired quite a lot of damage over the years and their work was faultless. It was just that they seemed to be causing more disruption than the gang who’d invaded the building. Penny’s phone rang, an internal number. It had been going on all morning and she recognised the number.

“What have they done now, Yolanda?” Asked Penny.

“They’ve now sealed off the toilets on the fourth floor. No idea when they might be open again. A cracked pipe or something.”

Penny knew about the toilets and didn’t think it was a huge problem. There were toilets on the floors above and below the fourth. It was Yolanda creating a drama again, though telling her that would just make things worse.

“Use the toilets on the third floor for now.” Said Penny. “I will talk to the builders though; they need to give a timescale for these repairs.”

Penny went back to completing her narrative to go with the five-year business and investment plan. She’d discovered, as so many others before her had discovered, that being CEO didn’t mean no longer having a boss. She now had several non-exec directors asking questions about the business and a few merchant banks. With luck, the five-year plan would keep them all quiet for a while. Her phone rang again, an outside number, a cell phone she recognised.

“Hi Ronald.” She said.

Ronald Kelly, Foxy’s new right-hand guy, or so it seemed. Penny hadn’t heard much from him lately, which she was choosing to view as good news.

“Good morning, Penny. I was hoping to borrow you for a few moments today.”

With Ruby around, dealing with British Intelligence, seemed as inevitable as death and taxes.

“I’m really busy....Will tomorrow do?” She asked.

“The police picked up a man last night. He was showing a lot of interest in the comings and goings from your offices. He even had a set of binoculars. They can hold him on something for a day or two, the usual wearing odd coloured socks in a built-up area, kind of thing. Though, if he demands to see a solicitor, he’ll be out by tonight.”

“That’s great, but I don’t see why you need me.” Said Penny.

“The local police have him at Bishopsgate police station. I’m there, leaning on them a little to hold him for the full twenty-four hours. It’s not exactly by the book, but could you come here? Just look at this guy’s face. If he rings a few bells, even as a guy always in the coffee shop when you are; they can hold him for longer. You have my word he’ll never see you.”

“Is he known to the police?” She asked.

“I can tell you all about him, when you come here. Bishopsgate cop shop, it’s just around the corner from you. Two minutes in a cab.....This matters Penny.”

It was insane and she had the distinct feeling Ronald wasn’t telling her even a tenth of the whole story. Still, her curiosity was going into overdrive and it might help Foxy’s people find the criminals who’d organised the attack on the Polandrous building.

"You'll be there when I get there ?" She asked.

"Yes, definitely."

"I'm on my way."

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Many think money rules the world and, on the whole, Ruby tended to agree. When it came to impossible favours though, connections tended to work better than bucket loads of cash. Want to give someone the perfect funeral, with no official paperwork ? Connections definitely worked better than cash. The British forces in Aden didn't always see eye to eye with the local police, though the same could be said for some army bases in England. There was friction, but when it came down to it, Aden and Britain were on the same side. Which side that was might be open to debate, but they were definitely on the same one. Snowy had been briefed by London, he'd arrived ready to make the necessary calls to the right people. His real job had been to deliver an old but huge cargo plane, but like all of Foxy's military contacts, Snowy was versatile. The white-haired man rumoured to have once been in the SAS, was now in his sixties, maybe even late sixties. He'd trained George how to use a low altitude parachute and George still had some of the bruises, or at least that was what he claimed.

"Thank you for dealing with the paperwork." Said Ruby.

"There was none, not really. Just a phone call from the chief of police telling them they had clearance to bury an Anna Kaloyanova." Said Snowy.

Ruby had no idea if Anna was religious, though she suspected she wasn't. Attending christenings, marriages and funerals, tends to give away the religion someone is born into. As far as Ruby was aware, Anna had no family and she'd definitely never attended any of the usual church ceremonies.

"I'm not into churches, but I like this one." Said Charlie.

"A local sect, we probably won't understand a word of the ceremony." Said Ruby. "I just thought that someone needed to say something over her."

"I can understand that." Said Charlie.

Ruby hadn't told Doc about Anna being killed. That phone call was for later, though he had to know. Anna had been about twenty eight and the relationship with Doc had been the most important in her short life. Ruby knew that for a fact. Anna had told her after they'd shared a bottle of tequila in Nairobi. The man who'd given the service muttered at Sarah, who of course, spoke the local form of Arabic.

"He wants to know if anyone wants to say anything ?" Said Sarah.

The church was small, but beautifully decorated with what looked like hand painted murals. There were members of the congregation there, people who didn't know Anna. Not that it mattered, the more the merrier. Ruby had no idea what religion the church belonged to, just that it was a Yemeni sect of one of them. Not that it mattered, final words said over someone, are final words. The language and Gods involved seemed immaterial.

"I'd like to say something." Said Sophie.

That was a surprise and a bit worrying. Sophie could be a bit too honest and direct at times. Still, it saved Ruby the job of trying to say something when she really wanted to go somewhere private and cry for a day, maybe two days. Sophie had presence for a tiny girl, huge amounts of presence. She glared at everyone in the church, turning to make sure everyone came under her gaze.

"Anna was my friend." Said Sophie. "First and foremost though, she was a fighter, a warrior. Anna never backed down or ran away, ever. She lost part of her hand, while killing something unkillable. I don't care if she wasn't always nice, or always polite. Anna was a warrior and I loved her for that."

Ruby dabbed her eyes with a tissue she'd brought for that purpose. Only a tiny number of the local congregation would speak English and they'd think Sophie was a little crazy. As funeral speeches went, it was strange, but it was totally appropriate for Anna.

"Wow." Said Snowy.

"Yes indeed.....Wow." Said Ruby.

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Olga had sent one of her people to pick up Nadia Irina Petrova from the airport. She'd sent them in a fifteen-year-old clunker of a car, one of the worst Olga's gang still used. She didn't want Nadia to think working in Budapest was going to be all about limousines and mansions. Olga hadn't immediately gone to see Nadia, the moment she'd come through the door. Bosses didn't do that kind of thing, especially Russian bosses. Nadia was good at her job and Olga wanted her to fit in. It was just that there was an accepted etiquette when poaching people from other gangs. The housekeeper showed Nadia to her room, which it seemed she liked. Olga sent for Nadia that evening, just before dinner. There were hugs of course, they had known one another since being street urchins.

"Good to have you in Budapest." Said Olga. "Is your room alright?"

"Yes, it's perfect. Am I allowed to bring people back here?"

"Would you listen if I said no?"

"If the guy was really cute, of course I'd ignore you."

There was more hugging and at some point, a bottle of decent vodka made an appearance. They still hadn't talked about business, when the gong sounded for dinner.

"What the hell was that?" Asked Nadia.

"The dinner gong and I have a proper chef."

"Wow, I think I must have died and gone to heaven."

"We can talk details after we eat." Said Olga. "Give me a name now though, who is our cut off going to be?"

"You know her I think, from a long time ago. You must remember Maya Mizrahi?"

"Yes, wasn't she feeding information to the CIA in Bucharest?" Asked Olga.

"That's the lady. Any connection we had with her was fleeting at best and a long time ago. The CIA cut her loose for some reason, but the Russians still have a grudge with her name on it. She's perfect for our cut off, the Russians will cut her up into tiny pieces."

Olga didn't kill anyone unless it made business sense. Similarly, she'd never cause someone a painful death unless there was a damned good reason. Maya had fed information to the CIA though and she'd tried to double cross Dimitri. Sad that anyone needed to die, but if it had to happen, Maya was the perfect choice.

"Yes, she sounds the perfect choice." Said Olga.

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Todd hadn't intended dropping off the boys to be a well-attended event, it just sort of happened that way. Sophie had used the word shambles a couple of times, which seemed unfair. In the end there were so many there to say goodbye to Damu and Enki, that they'd needed two vehicles. Hired vehicles of course and guards of course, mercenaries hired by the hour. The local mercenaries liked to use their own vehicles, so they were a convoy of four trucks by the time they entered Bi'r Jabir. The Green City some called it, though most still called it Bi'r Jabir. The couple who'd agreed to look after the boys liked to live under the radar. Having four large military trucks outside their house, definitely wasn't helping their wish for a quiet, under the radar, lifestyle.

Not that Yasmine and Amjad Siddiqi complained, though they had looked surprised. The hospitality tradition kicked in, as the couple frantically tried to find enough refreshments for so many. Todd wondered whether Sophie had been right to call it a shambles. Luckily, the hired mercenaries seemed to prefer to wait outside, with their vehicles.

"Lemonade....I hope you all like lemonade?" Said Yasmine.

"Yes, I'd love some." Said Monique.

"Good, good.....Yasmine is famous for her home-made lemonade." Said Amjad.

Todd had realised he couldn't take the boys on his own. He needed backup, just in case it was a day for things to kick off in Aden. Preferably a woman, as the boys might need a stand in maternal figure. They loved Sophie, who had grudgingly agreed to go. Not that she was too keen on his idea that the kids needed a temporary mother figure for the trip. Calaso had wanted to come, she'd never visited Aden before, or anywhere else that wasn't in Somalia. Where she went, her brother was sure to follow, so Abe was added to the ever-growing shambles.

Charlie had invited herself along, as a last-minute addition to what was beginning to look like a company outing of some kind. Todd was actually relieved when Max and Ruby, said they were too busy to attend. The huge cargo plane was wonderful, but unexpected. How to best use it, would take a lot of organising.

"They're a nice couple, I like them." Monique whispered to him. "Do they have children of their own."

"They did have a little girl.....The wars....You know." Whispered Todd.

Monique nodded at him; she knew what he meant. Ruby had told him to take a woman with him, so he'd assumed Monique was staying with Max for the day. It had seemed odd for her not to look over the Siddiqis, she was the boys' mother after all. When Monique joined the ever-growing numbers, her personal guard tagged along, together with..... Todd found Sophie whispering in his ear, not that quietly.

"I told you it would be a shambles." She said. "A nice shambles though, the boys will be feeling a lot of love."

"The good people of Bi'r Jabir probably think the circus is in town." He said. "But yes, you're right. It's the perfect way to say farewell to the boys."

Everyone liked Yasmine and Amjad Siddiqi, the handover of the boys became a social event. Yes, the boys cried when it was time their mother to leave, but that had been expected. On the way back to where they were staying, someone took a shot at the leading truck in their convoy. Not a serious attack, probably a local gang letting them know they were on their turf. Monique looked up, but there was no fear in her eyes.

"No need to worry." Said Todd. "Aden can be a bit like that, sometimes."

"So can the Banlieue, outside Paris." Said Monique. "I'm sure Yasmine and Amjad will keep the boys safe."

None of the hired guards seemed worried, or overly concerned about the bullet lodged in the passenger side door of one of their trucks. When they said goodbye to the mercenaries, Todd had a chance to examine the bullet hole. His local Arabic wasn't good, but he knew the guards were saying it was a seven point six two round.

"AK47?" He asked.

"Yes, AK47."

An antique weapon, a relic of the soviet era, but still much prized by bandits, local tribespeople and of course, assorted terrorist group. An AK47 on fully automatic could cut a car in half. They'd been

lucky, but that was how it was in places like Aden. You arrived in town and hoped your luck held until you left town.

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Gareth Lee had noticed that not everyone thought about the consequences of their actions, even if those consequences could be nasty and brutal. There was no paperwork on the computer shop owner, currently going through interrogation. Such people were rarely documented. Josh was the man's first name, which was only known to a tiny number of trusted employees. His surname and the business name he used for the shop, were immaterial. Once Josh had given the Gallaan Group all the information that might be useful, he would die.

"I knew it, I just knew the drive had to have a call home device." Said Josh.

Josh could still speak reasonably clearly; despite being softened up by Gareth's best interrogator. Beatings had only been targeted on the torso, so far. No use beating someone to the point where they get talkative, only to find out you've broken their jaw. Usually Gallaan used more subtle techniques, but Gareth wanted quick results.

"Not a call home device, just a chip that records locations." Said Gareth. "Like a cell phone processor, but smaller and easier to hide. Once it did an automatic data dump, finding you was easy."

"Shit, I knew they were trouble." Said Josh.

"Fletcher and Eugenie.....Yes, they're definitely trouble."

Josh's face twitched. Always make the subject of the interrogation think you know everything. That you just need them to corroborate a few things. It made it easier for them to betray whoever they were trying so hard, not to mention.

"Flex, she called the guy Flex." Said Josh.

"Who recommended them to you ? Tell me Josh, we know you only ever see people you've been introduced to."

"It wasn't like that. They came in to buy a laptop and we got talking. Then they showed me the backup drive."

A lie, such an obvious lie. Gareth could threaten various way to loosen the man's tongue, but he wouldn't, not yet. Gallaan had some very good interrogators and there was no use in paying for the best and then trying to do the job yourself.

"I'll put a pin in that, but my interrogator will be asking you further questions about who recommended you to them."

"I'm not lying, I swear.....They were a walk in, off the street."

Josh didn't seem good with pain; he'd yelled for hours from just a couple of cracked ribs. Gareth had watched his interrogators use blades and hot wires in some very imaginative way. One tough ex-special ops colonel, had seemed like the sort who'd rather die than talk. There had been a few of those over the years, though they were rarer than unicorn droppings. That colonel had told them everything, after his scrotum had been nailed to the chair. That was for his interrogator to use as a threat though, Gareth was there to listen really, most of the time.

"Were Flex and Eugenie staying in a hotel ?" Asked Gareth. "Were they from France, or travelling into Paris from somewhere else ?"

"Europe is a big place." Said Josh. "People don't expect me to ask questions, but I got the impression they were from the east, maybe Poland."

A lie, Gareth was beginning to know Josh's body language and use of certain phrases. When he said he got, or had the impression about something; everything he said after that was a lie. Still, the interrogator would follow up on that.

"We found the copy you took of our data, Josh." Said Gareth. "So, you know what they know."

"I never looked at it, I swear.....I never looked at it."

"I'm not that concerned about you Josh. You listened to them. What were they particularly interested in? What pressed their buttons?"

"Norway, they whispered about a bank in Tromsø."

"Why Josh? What specifically made them home in on that particular bank?"

"I'm not sure."

Another lie, but the session had been a success. The interrogator was listening to it all and taking notes on what needed following up. By avoiding answering certain questions, Josh had given a road map to what they needed to know. It was time to let the man with sharp blades get to work.

"I must go now, Josh." Said Gareth. "We will be talking again though, later today."

Through a door and into another room, where the interrogator was listening on headphones.

"You're sure you know what needs following up?" Asked Gareth.

"Yes, no problem."

The interrogator pushed a trolley out of the room. It was covered in all sorts of nasty looking instruments of pain. Some were dental implements bought at auctions and most were on the trolley purely for effect. The small sharp blades though, all of those would be used. Maybe the hammer too and some of the masonry nails. Gareth heard Josh begin to scream, when the trolley was wheeled into the room where he was lashed to a chair.

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Ruby had been to see the cargo plane, with Max and Snowy. It was Snowy who'd arranged for two military consultants to join them. She had no idea who was paying for the use of the plane and the consultants, but so far, no one had mentioned money to her. That usually meant one or two western governments had an interest in seeing her succeed with whatever she was doing. Ruby wasn't that focused though. The huge aircraft was important, but there was still a little unfinished business in Aden.

"You seem to like Russian aircraft, Snowy." She said. "I seem to remember you finding an Antonov for us once before."

"Oh yes, I remember. That one was still in active service." Said Snowy. "Borrowing it meant calling in a lot of favours, with people who don't like being reminded they owe you a favour. They're a good solid aircraft, built in the Ukraine these days."

"We checked her over, the aircraft is a little old, but structural sound." Said one of the consultants.

"He's saying she won't fall out of the sky at an inconvenient moment." Said Snowy.

"Do we get a pilot to go with it?" Asked Ruby.

"Yes, but not officially." Said one of the consultants. "There are two pilots in Aden and a flight engineer. If you want them, they can be hired. The price is for you to agree with them."

"They're good people, Ruby." Added Snowy.

Money had to be mentioned, it was what kept the world turning. Money kept people fed, housed and warm in the winter. It also probably bought a few luxuries, if you were a pilot in Aden, who could get an Antonov off the ground.

"Have them here in the morning..... I'd see them tonight, but I have somewhere else to be." Said Ruby.

"I'll get them here, Ruby." Said Snowy. "They won't be cheap, but the good ones never are." British airmen doing a moonlight wasn't likely, but they might be Russian airforce, or even Americans. Ruby didn't care, in much the same way that she barely looked at the aircraft checklist the consultants had prepared for the elderly cargo plane. The pilots were needed to fly the plane and the plane would get them and their equipment to just about anywhere they needed to go. At the end of the day, that was all that really mattered.

"Just out of interest, where did the plane come from?" Asked Max.

It was nice to have Max show a little curiosity, it saved her from kicking the tyres and asking about how many careful owners had used the huge aircraft in the past.

"An NGO chartered the aircraft from a freight company in Nigeria." Said Snowy. "A large NGO I'm not allowed to name, but you've probably put some coins in one of their tins. They used the plane to bring in several tons of food, blankets and medical supplies. A few phone calls from London and they were happy to extend the charter period, to an unspecified end date. Just don't destroy her....The Antonov is old, but she still has a high dollar value."

Everyone was assigning a female gender to the aircraft, which interested Ruby, but didn't surprise her. She mentally thought of the Antonov as female, yet called her car a he, or a him. A puzzle, but one for another day.

"Do we need to pay anyone a deposit, or hire fee?" Asked Max.

Snowy smiled at the consultants, a we know something you don't know, kind of smile.

"Well, you do, in theory." Said Snowy. "But by the time the MOD realise that and raise the necessary paperwork, to approve sending out an invoice....."

"We'll all probably be retired, or in our graves." Said a consultant.

"I'm reliably informed there are still recharges not invoiced from the Suez crisis." Said Snowy.

There was laughter and it could have gone on to be a pizza and a few drinks with people Ruby liked.

There was something she had to do though, unfinished business. Snowy and the consultants had arrived in two Jeeps and he'd already agreed to lend her one of them for the night.

"Do you want me to go with you?" Asked Max.

"No, but thank you.....I need to do this on my own."

Dusk outside, the plane looked even more massive against a darkening sky. A white painted aircraft with the name of the freight company in green. There was a logo of some kind on the tail, though it was hard to make out in the growing darkness. A huge Antonov that everyone would assume was carrying perfectly legal freight. As transport went, it was just about perfect.

"Are you sure you don't need backup?" Asked Snowy. "This isn't the safest city in the world."

"I've walked alone through worse places, lots of worse places. I'll be fine, I always am."

There was a necessary stop to make to where they were staying. Flowers of all things, she couldn't arrive there without flowers. It wasn't just a tradition, it felt right. Spider and Sarah were waiting for her of course, loitering outside her room like a couple of moody teenagers.

"We'll give you space, but we're going with you." Said Sarah.

"It matters to us too." Added Spider.

Ruby knew Anna would be there too, if she hadn't died. Anna, with a small automatic shoved down the back of her trousers. Spider and Sarah would be armed with something small that didn't leave a large bulge in their clothes. Of course they'd be armed. Aden was a beautiful city with a lot of history, but it was also bandit country.

"We bought flowers too." Said Sarah.

"Roses, they cost a small fortune." Added Spider.

Sarah gave Spider one of her I'll get you later, looks. Ruby was glad they wanted to go with her, it really wasn't something to do totally alone.

"Alright, get in the Jeep." She said.

The cemetery wasn't far, Aden wasn't a large city. Officially home to eight hundred thousand people, though the true total was probably much higher. Ruby had seen the cemetery once to choose the plot and again when Anna's coffin had been lowered into the ground. No ironmongery and electric motors to lower the coffin, just men with ropes. The grave was now filled, the earth flattened with shovels. No headstone, that would come later, after the ground had settled. For the moment there was just a grave marker with a number on it and a single line of writing in Arabic. Aden wasn't a country with street lights in places like cemeteries, it would soon be very dark. Ruby placed her flowers among the others piled up beside the grave. Sarah did the same.

"Goodbye Anna." Said Sarah.

"I'm so sorry." Said Ruby.

Why was she sorry? The words seemed to arrive from somewhere out of her control. Ruby should have asked Anna more about herself, but Anna Kaloyanova had been a very private person. Plus, being a gangster in Tallin for several years was bound to make her cautious. Families were a weakness, a vulnerability. There had to be someone out there though, everyone has a family. They'd know of course, the first Christmas when no cards turned up in the post. Not know for certain, but deep down, they'd know Anna was gone. Ruby stood there for nearly an hour, looking down at the soft earth. She could no longer see Sarah and Spider, but she knew they were there.

"Are you two ready to leave?" She asked.

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