

## Ruby

### Chapter 8 – Varna

**“We need to leave. Even the Varna police can’t ignore a minor war on the outskirts of town.”**

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Ruby hadn’t mentioned her meeting with Kurt to anyone, it sounded crazy to her. She’d spent their last day in Romania in a kind of daze, sitting quietly and watching the snow covered fields go by the car window. Sarah had needed frequent stops to pee, but Ruby had rarely bothered to leave the comfort of the back seat of the old beige Mercedes.

“Are you feeling alright ?”

Olga had asked her when they’d stopped for lunch.

“I just want to get over the border into Bulgaria. I know this sounds insane, but I feel like something is chasing after us, something bad.”

Olga had merely nodded at her, everyone seemed to be troubled after the deaths at the roadblock. Lunch had been a few packets taken from the house where they’d spent the night. Sarah had selected the various packets and it had been a surprisingly good lunch. There had been no further roadblocks and they’d only seen a handful of cars on the road all day. They’d decided to press on after dark, or rather Ruby had decided.

“No more nights in Romania,” she’d said, “we can make Varna by 1am.”

Spider had increased his speed and at about eleven they crossed the invisible border into Bulgaria. It was only a mark on a map, there wasn’t even a sign on the back road they were using. Everything looked the same, but Ruby almost felt a dark cloud lift from her. The deaths had been her fault. She’d brought Spider along with her, knowing he had problems in his past. She should have kept him in the car with her, then there would have been no deaths. A few Euros would have been handed over and they’d have driven on and gone about their business.

“Silly bitch, this isn’t being tough.” She muttered to herself.

Spider was looking at her in the rear view mirror, but he said nothing. His phone began to buzz and he slowed down and took the call. Ruby could tell instantly that it was Olga calling him. Strange that Spider and Olga had seemed destined to be lovers, yet now they sniped and hissed at each other like rival feral cats in a back alley.

“Olga is going to take the lead in the van,” said Spider, “we’ll follow her to where her contact in Varna lives.”

For an hour the countryside outside the window didn’t change. But then the cars passing the other way looked newer and better than theirs. Now they were the vagabonds arriving from the north. By about 1am there was the definite tang of sea air and Olga was pushing the van to go at almost foolhardy speed around bends in the road. Someone seemed to be looking after them that night, god or devil and they reached the house without incident. The house almost looked over the sea, but there was a slight hill that must have blocked the view during the day. The nearest neighbour was a good hundred yards back along the road, it was the perfect house if your affairs required a certain amount of privacy.

“Let Olga do all the talking Spider.” Said Ruby.

The night air was freezing and Ruby couldn’t help shivering as she left the warmth of the car. She had a premonition that something was wrong in the house they were about to enter. Nothing

definite, no images of men with guns, merely a strong feeling that death would soon be a visitor to the old stone built dwelling.

"You may need your browning." Ruby told Spider.

The weather added to the sense of threat by sending a brief flurry of snow at them as they approached the house. Andrei was running a slight fever and needed antibiotics for an infection in his wound, but he was still capable of fighting if he was needed. Olga ignored the slim chance of being seen and slung a Kalashnikov over her shoulder as she got out of the van.

"I can't see any lights," said Olga, "I hope Monique is safe."

There was a garage attached to the house and its black painted doors were slightly ajar. Spider slid through the gap and reappeared a few seconds later.

"Their car is still in there." He said.

Ruby was seeing threats everywhere. By the side of the house there was a fibreglass dinghy on a rusty trailer. There was no way anyone could have hidden in the dinghy, but Ruby still gave it a wide berth. Olga was now banging on the front door and calling for someone called Monique.

"Monique, it's Olga. Open the door!"

Andrei was looking through one of the front windows of the house, while Ruby stayed in the road, Sarah holding her hand. Was it her nervousness infecting Sarah? Ruby wasn't sure, but she was becoming increasingly certain that Kurt was right. There was going to be a lot of death in Varna. There was the sound of a struggle coming from the rear of the house and Ruby realised that Spider had was no longer with them. For a large man, Spider did seem to have a natural ability to move quickly and stay hidden. Ruby ran towards the back of the house, pulling Sarah along with her. Olga was with them, her AK47 held up in front of her and ready to fire.

"I'm sorry, he opened the back door and went for me." Said Spider.

"It's Matt, he lives with Monique." Said Olga.

The man Olga referred to as Matt was unconscious on the ground, a baseball bat still held in his left hand.

"Is he dead?" Asked Sarah.

"No, but he'll have a headache when he wakes up." Answered Spider.

"Bring him inside..... quickly!"

The woman standing just inside the back door had a strong French accent and Ruby assumed it was Monique. Spider easily picked up her unconscious lover and carried him into the dark house.

"Can we have some lights on? I don't want to bash his head again." He asked

"There has been a blonde woman watching the house for much of the day," said Monique, "and sometimes she has a man with her."

Once the lights were on, the inside of the house looked comfortable and inviting. Spider followed Monique into a well-furnished lounge and dropped Matt onto the sofa. He groaned, which was a good sign, he was waking up.

"We had the blonde following us to Budapest, but I thought we'd lost her." Said Ruby.

"She's good, probably ex CIA," said Monique, "you don't lose the good ones, they'll always find you again. Do you know who she's working for?"

"Not a clue." Said Spider.

"We've had a lot of people trying to follow us." Added Sarah.

There was a modern M16 assault rifle propped against one wall and a shot gun on the TV stand. It was obvious that Monique was treating the blonde as a serious threat. She noticed Ruby examining the firepower spread around the room.

“There are at least three of them,” said Monique, “the blonde and two men. Only one man seems to be with her all the time, but the old man is the one who worries me. He walks with a limp, but you can tell he’s still dangerous. He turns up and walks past the house without seeming to be interested in anything.”

“He’s a predator, I know the type.” Added Matt.

Matt had a local Bulgarian accent and he didn’t seem up to getting off the sofa yet.

“I should send you away,” said Monique, “this is your problem not mine. I’m not going to die for people I don’t know.”

Monique was glaring at Ruby, but Olga ignored her and sat on the sofa, shoving Matt’s feet out of her way.

“We need food Monique and Andrei needs antibiotics for an infected wound. Then we’ll get a few hours sleep. In the morning we’ll be out of your house and the blonde will more than likely leave you alone and follow us.”

Monique looked at Andrei and then pushed him in front of her towards the stairs.

“I want to look at your wound,” she said, “I’ll clean it and put on a fresh dressing and I have some antibiotics.”

They climbed the stairs and their voices could be heard in the room above them. It was obvious that Monique was ordering Andrei about.

“Her family are Armenian.” Said Olga.

She said it as though it explained everything, Ruby merely nodded as though she understood.

“Shall we look at the kitchen ? I think we’ll have to do the cooking.” Said Sarah.

The meal was quick and mainly out of tins. It was past 3am when they brought in the bedrolls from the van and turned the lounge into a makeshift barracks.

“We should keep watch.” Said Olga.

“I’ll go first, I’ve been sleeping most of the day.” Said Andrei.

“Wake me in two hours.” Said Olga.

Ruby decided that someone would wake her if she was needed for anything. She simply took off her shoes and wrapped herself in her bedroll and was fast asleep in less than a minute.

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“We’ll be in Bulgaria just after dawn sir.”

Carlos wasn’t used to being called sir, he put it down to Leo having been in the army most of his life. The British army of course, George had a thing about hiring his heavies from the ranks of NCOs the UK had laid off during the cut backs. Leo had driven trucks in the army, when he wasn’t using the sort of heavy machine gun that Rambo would have loved. He was the best at driving their recreational vehicle, so Carlos had given him a position to get to on the SatNav and had left him to it. Rose, who was in the back of the vehicle sleeping, had spent most of her military years in the UK military police. The motorhome had been Rose’s idea and it was a good one. RVs had enough weight to be sure footed, if they encountered bad weather and it gave them space for the weapons picked up from a business park just outside Istanbul.

“Will you be ok for a while Leo ? I want to get a couple of hours sleep.”

“Yes sir, can you wake Rose ? It’s her turn to take over driving.”

“I’ll send her out.”

Darn, Rose seemed to find every hole in the road, but he knew that Leo needed some rest, he’d driven for a good six hours and that was after loading the special cargo. Carlos went through the door behind the seats and into the luxury flat on wheels that was their home on the road. It was

hired under a fake name of course and expendable, but Carlos already loved the comfort of chilled wine on the move. He looked at the weapons lying on the floor of the lounge area and cringed. What were they likely to meet that needed those sorts of heavy weapons ?

“They look like they belong on the turret of a tank.” He muttered.

Rose was already on the edge of the bed and putting on her socks when he went to wake her. For about the tenth time she was giving him that certain look. Rose wasn't subtle, her hand went straight for the top of his thigh.

“Leo can wait another twenty minutes.” She said.

She was a good ten years older than him, though that had never stopped him in the past. Carlos knew it was because they were likely to meet Ruby quite soon. Did he want a woman he'd shagged looking down a gun sight at the woman he loved ? He removed Rose's hand from his balls.

“When the mission is over. Leo needs you to take over.”

“Yes sir.”

There was no bitterness in her voice, no resentment at the rejection. Rose had spent years in a male dominated environment and she'd developed a very thick skin. She looked at the weapons as she left.

“Do we really need these sir ?”

“So they say.”

Carlos climbed into the bed she'd just left, enjoying the warmth her body had left behind in the bedding. A few seconds later he was asleep.

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The problem was Max and his neurotic fear of talking on phones. Yes, Cynthia knew there were risks, but it gave her a way of communicating with him. Now she had no way of obtaining orders and she had no idea where he'd gone.

“You're sure he didn't mention where he was going ?”

He actually jumped back, had she been shouting that loud ? Apologising would be taken as a sign of weakness, so she glared at him, demanding a reply.

“No, he's been going off on his own quite a bit lately.”

She waved him away, still glaring as he left the room. Max had become very strange after seeing some of the Das Geheimnis material. Death was death to Cynthia. Ripped apart by a roadside bomb or turned inside out by some kind of super being, you still just ended up dead. But Max had gone all Zen on her and was becoming increasingly distant. She picked up her mobile phone and made a decision. Fuck Max, they knew where Ruby and her gang were and they knew that George wanted her brought back to Britain. The other gun smugglers and drug dealers were expendable, including the half crazy girl Sarah.

“Get everything ready, we're going in just after dawn.” She said.

Cynthia picked her M16 up and selected a couple of stun grenades from a box in a corner of the lounge. It was going to be like old times, she could almost see the one called Spider dead at her feet. That was the only solution with misfits like that. Her father had spent all his life teaching her the power of prayer and a good assault rifle and although Cynthia had been through a crisis of faith, she never questioned the power of an M16 and stun grenades.

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Roland got to the phone first and muttered a thank you after listening to the caller.

“He says an old beige Mercedes and a white van are outside the house east of Primorski Park.” Said Roland.

So they were in Varna and a day earlier than expected. It had been Serge's idea to pay the local kids to act as informers. Of course they'd tell all their friends and eventually their parents that a man staying at the seediest hotel in Varna had offered them money for information. It looked bad no matter which way you looked at it, but he and Roland would be long gone by the time the local police came calling. Besides, it worked, it always did. Local street kids saw everything; they knew when something didn't fit, when someone new arrived in town.

"The same house our blonde friend has been so interested in." Said Serge.

"That crazy woman," said Roland, "she actually pointed her Glock at me yesterday."

Serge had to smile; Roland took things like that far too personally.

"She's obviously being pressured to get results. Stress can make some people very jumpy." Said Serge.

"She's crazy; you can see it in her eyes. And there are those deaths in Fallujah on her file."

Serge stopped grinning, Roland had a point. There never had been any plan to get involved in a fire fight with Max and his team, but there was no arguing that Cynthia was a dangerous and unstable person.

"So, do we ride in on horseback to rescue the damsel in distress?" He asked.

"Only if we get orders to. We're outgunned and outnumbered."

"You have no warrior spirit Roland."

Serge took his automatic out of its holster and it did look a bit tame compared to the assault rifles Max's team were armed with. But then again the DGSE was a public body and had far less money to throw around than Max. No wealthy client was going to give them an open ended budget to bring Ruby home.

"Do you think this is about bringing her home?" He asked.

"Who?"

Serge glared at him, he knew Roland was being deliberately dense.

"To be honest I don't care Serge. I just want to carry out our orders and get home to my wife, preferably in one piece."

"But supposing our crazy Cynthia decides it's less hassle to simply kill Ruby. Do you care then?"

Roland was giving him the long suffering look that he was getting to know so well.

"I'm not a monster Serge, of course I care if she lives or dies. But what can we do about it?"

Serge rummaged in his pocket and found three coins. Ideally they'd have been identical, but he made do with three separate value coins. The important thing was that each had a picture of a person on one side.

"The British have a way of deciding things that they call heads or tails. I propose we let fate decide, or luck if you believe in such a thing."

Roland was looking at him as though he'd gone mad.

"Stop fooling about." Said Roland.

"I'm being serious. I am going to throw these three coins in the air and let them land on the floor.

Just a single toss of three coins and if it's mostly tails we ride in to rescue the damsel. If it's heads we sit on our backsides and wait for orders. Agreed?"

"No it's not agreed ! I really worry about you sometimes."

Serge ignored Roland and threw the coins so high that one bounced off the hotel room ceiling. They landed and they could both see the result was that all three coins showed tails. Serge put his gun back in its holster and put on his jacket.

"It seems fate isn't being subtle today. All three tails.... We ride Roland, we ride !"

Roland just sat in the chair and watched as Serge picked up his car keys and opened the door.

"I'm not going, this is crazy."

"You'll follow me out and get in the car, I'm certain of it."

"How can you be so sure ."

"Because you care Roland, you'd never be able to face your pretty wife and tell her you let me get killed."

Serge left the room and went out to the car park and sat in their car. By the time he had the engine started, Roland was opening the passenger door and entering the vehicle.

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Ruby wasn't usually that good in the mornings, but she woke shortly after dawn and knew it was important for her to be fully awake. Someone was cooking breakfast and it smelled wonderful. She found her bag of clean clothes, though everything was beginning to look a bit crumpled and grubby after being in there for so long. She used a downstairs toilet to dress, a shower could follow later, if there was a later.

"It looks like being a nice day." Said Spider.

She was beginning to think that if Spider found himself unexpectedly in hell, he'd find something to throw in a pan and fry for breakfast. He seemed to have found eggs and tomatoes and some kind of local sausage. It smelled wonderful and Ruby couldn't help grinning at him in a hopeful way.

"I cooked enough for two, I thought the smell would wake you up."

Spider emptied the contents of the pan onto two plates and then put a mug of hot coffee in front of her. Ruby could see why army guys were so keen on fry ups, they filled you up and made you ready for anything.

"Sticks to your stomach." Said Spider.

He said it with the kind of happy smile that implied that was a good thing.

"When I get home I'm going to start every morning with a fry up." She said.

Ruby deliberately took her time over breakfast and accepted another mug of coffee from Spider. She knew with certainty that trouble was coming, but she was determined not to let it ruin her meal.

Eventually she pushed the plate away and stood up from the table.

"I'd better wake the other, they're here."

"Who's here Ruby ?"

"Everyone I think."

Spider looked out of the window and cursed as he saw a man run towards the cover of the dinghy on the rusty trailer. Ruby could hear the strange clacking noise that meant Spider was preparing his AK47 for battle. By then though she was in the lounge and kicking feet to rouse everyone from their slumber.

"They're here. Wake up !" She shouted.

Sarah actually shrieked as she woke up, which meant that Olga was holding a large dagger as she jumped to her feet.

"Who's here ?" She asked.

"Everyone who's been searching for us."

Andrei was the last to wake and he seemed to pull a heavy automatic pistol from his jacket pocket while still half asleep. There was the now familiar series of clacks and rattles as he made sure the weapon was ready to use.

"Who is it ?" Shouted Andrei.

Ruby ignored him, she felt she'd already answered that question accurately and thoroughly. The ruckus downstairs woke Monique in her bedroom and she appeared on the stairs. She too had obviously gone to bed fully dressed.

"Is the blonde bitch out there?" She asked.

"Yes she is." Shouted Spider from the kitchen.

There was the sound of breaking glass as Spider smashed the kitchen window, quickly followed by the unmistakable bark of his Kalashnikov being fired. Ruby knew she had to be outside and near the dinghy, beyond that she was uncertain of anyone's fate. She was going to lose some of those with her, that was inevitable. She was going to have to kill some, if not all of their enemies, that too was inevitable. Ruby found the prospect of killing far worse than the idea of seeing her friends die.

"Stupid, stupid... you must be tough!" She shouted at herself.

Olga broke a front window and there was the sound of her automatic pistol being fired at someone near their vehicles. No one cared about Ruby muttering to herself, even Sarah had found a gun and was looking for a target to fire it at. From upstairs the sound of the M16 added to the noise and Ruby was able to open the kitchen door without being heard.

"Where are you going?" Asked Spider.

He was trying to stop her going outside, which was bad, her fate needed her to be outside.

"Let me go Spider, I need to go outside."

"But they'll shoot you."

"That didn't work before."

"So you can heal yourself again?"

That deserved a long, detailed and honest answer, but there wasn't time for her to give it.

"I'm not sure Spider, maybe, maybe not. But trust me, I need to be outside."

He opened the door and let her out, following her onto the bit of unfenced dirt that served as a back garden. There was a shed made of corrugated iron with a door hanging half off its hinges. There was no room for anyone to hide, it was too full of broken garden tools. As Ruby turned the corner of the house a young dark haired woman was in front of her and she seemed hurt.

"Move to your left Ruby." Spider told her.

She did and quickly, she trusted Spider in such matters. The woman in front of her had been shot in the stomach and she'd been pressing her hand on the wound. As if to prove how bad the wound was, she held up her bloody fingers for inspection.

"We're here to help you." The woman said.

She may indeed have meant Ruby no harm, but she made the mistake of lifting the gun in her other hand. Books often talk in terms of people being cut in half by automatic fire and Ruby had always assumed it to be an exaggeration, a bit of artistic licence by authors. Then Spider fired the AK47 and the woman in front really did seem to be cut in half just under her rib cage. The amount of blood was shocking, it seemed to cover all the ground around the woman and spatter had reached as far as six feet from her. Not the usual light red blood that comes out when you cut a finger. This was the dark red stuff that the body seems to consider as precious and normally keep deep inside your body.

"Make sure you don't get directly in front of me." Said Spider.

"Ok."

Where was directly in front? Surely it depended on where the enemy was? Ruby turned and saw spider half crouching with the AK47. He looked quite frightening, even to her. A few more paces and there was another person holding a serious looking weapon. Ruby had seen the small automatic machine pistols in the East and they could deliver a hail of bullets in a fraction of a second. A young

man with a military style crew cut holding the weapon this time, still no sign of the blonde bitch everyone seemed to hate so much, or the old man with the limp. There was the distracting sound of the M16 from the front of the house and Spider could so easily have killed the man, but Ruby heard him shout;

“Drop your weapon..... now !”

He ignored Spider, didn't even glance in that direction. The man had another target and he emptied the magazine of his weapon at someone they couldn't even see.

“Oh no, it's Andrei.” Said Ruby.

His lifeless body fell into view around the corner of the house. A switch that seemed initiated by stress had been pressed somewhere in Ruby and she could now feel the people around the house far better than she could see them. Thirty or forty small bullets had hit Andrei in a very short period of time and his heart had been shredded. Whatever could be called the soul lurked in the dead body for a few seconds and Ruby felt it go, evaporating like a shallow puddle on a hot day.

“Bastard !” Shouted Spider.

Spider fired three single shots. One hit the man in the shoulder and he cried out and spun around. The second bullet was enough, it entered the back of his chest and Ruby saw the fountain of blood erupt from the front of his chest as the bullet went right through his body. The third shot was out of pure hate and Spider placed it in the back of the man's head. Ruby saw half of the front of his face come away as the bullet exited his head. Odd looking ejections of blood sprang from his ruined face and covered the ground around him in blood and brain tissue. Ruby still felt a pull towards the old dinghy, so she carried on towards it, avoiding the puddle of dark red blood. Spider stayed with her and once at the old rusty boat trailer, they could see the front of the house.

“Christ !” Shouted Spider.

Had there been grenade explosions ? The scene in front of them implied there had been, but Ruby had been too involved in her own problems to hear them. Their van was now a tangled mess of metal and their Merc was riddled with bullet holes. Monique was hanging half out of an upstairs window, her M16 hanging by its strap, caught around her shoulder. What shocked Ruby was that Monique appeared to be on fire, or at least her clothing and hair was burning. The blonde bitch had been busy, Ruby could see her dodging about behind their wrecked merc. Of course Cynthia wouldn't have known about the armour plating in the doors, but it had obviously saved her life. Ruby had never seen with her mind so clearly. She not only knew who Cynthia was, she also understood her motivations and she knew that Cynthia wouldn't stop until they were all dead.

“I'm the one you want. Leave the others alone.” Shouted Ruby.

The blonde hair bobbed about and then Cynthia fired a burst into the upper windows of the house and stepped from behind the merc. She saw Spider and brought up the muzzle of her weapon.

“No. He won't fire, you have my word.”

Ruby looked at Spider and hoped he'd understand.

“Lower your weapon,” she said, “trust me Spider, this needs to happen.”

Spider lowered the AK47 and did his best to crouch behind the dinghy, but it gave no real cover. Cynthia was wounded, but not seriously, she still moved in the fluid way that only warriors move. There was blood on her arm though, obviously Monique had managed to hit her at least once.

“What are you ?” Asked Cynthia.

Ruby didn't answer, she just watched Cynthia approach, the muzzle of her weapon aimed straight at Ruby. How close would she get before firing ? She was a professional, she'd want to be close enough



for the kill to be certain. Ruby looked into her mind and there was no mercy there, Cynthia was going to kill everyone.

“You can all put down your weapons !”

They’d all missed him arriving, but he was almost on top of Cynthia. Ruby picked up that he was called Roland that he worked for the French DGSE. She also picked up that Roland was petrified and worried that he’d never see his wife again. For some reason Ruby liked Roland, even if he was aiming a gun in her general direction. Cynthia lowered her weapon, but she showed no inclination to put it on the ground. Spider though seemed to recognise Roland as being what he’d call ‘fuzz’ and he propped his AK47 against the side of the dinghy trailer.

“This is none of your concern Roland.” Said Cynthia.

“I’m not letting you murder any more people.”

“You’ve no jurisdiction here.”

Cynthia let her weapon drop so that it pointed at the ground, just as Sarah came out of the house and aimed a huge revolver at her.

“She can’t get away with this !” Shouted Sarah.

“Can you actually hit anything with that ?” Laughed Cynthia.

Roland obviously saw Sarah as a threat and moved his aim to about halfway between her and Cynthia. It was all the opportunity the ex CIA agent needed and she fired a short burst into Roland. He gasped and span around before dying and falling to the ground. Ruby could almost understand Cynthia wanting her dead, but Roland ? There were consequences for killing secret service agents. A shot rang out and Cynthia grabbed at her ear, blood trickling through her fingers. Sarah obviously could hit something with the heavy revolver, but her next shot missed.

“Who are you ? Let go of me.” Said Sarah.

Serge, yes his name was Serge. Ruby felt his mind without intending too and there was far too much darkness there. He had an arm around Sarah, pulling her gun arm down. In his other hand he held an automatic pistol and he was staring at Roland’s dead body.

“She killed him,” shouted Sarah, “the crazy blonde bitch.”

Serge brought up his gun and fired. No hesitation, no wondering if Sarah was lying. Ruby knew he thought Cynthia was crazy and he’d known it for days. Sarah struggled as he fired and the shot hit the ground about two feet from Cynthia. She crouched and brought her weapon up, aiming it at Serge and Sarah. At the same time Spider made a grab for his AK47.

“No, No, No !” Screamed Ruby.

Cynthia fired and one bullet hit Sarah in the arm, but by then Ruby was in control. There was a wind like no other wind any of them had felt. It seemed to start where Ruby was stood and it only affected human flesh. Spider had to drop his weapon, as did Serge, but Cynthia seemed in real trouble. The others crouched as though in a hurricane, but the full force of the strange wind was aimed at Cynthia. The rest of her burst had gone wide and she was finding it impossible to lift her weapon to fire again.

“Kill the bitch.” Shouted Sarah.

Blades of grass were unaffected, as were bits of litter. The wind just seemed to be interest in Cynthia now and it blew her off her feet. Then her clothes ripped apart as the flesh beneath broke away from her bones and flew away from her. No one called for mercy, no one asked her to stop, they all hated the blonde bitch. Ruby kept the wind going until nothing was left of Cynthia but a small pile of bloody bones. Once the wind calmed Ruby went to check on Sarah, who was making a lot of noise about the bullet wound in her forearm.

"It's nothing," said Serge, "barely a scratch."

Sarah screamed again, as if daring Serge to tell anyone else that it was just a scratch. Ruby ran for the front door and mounted the stairs at a full run. Monique's body was still in the window and the entire room was full of the unbearable stench of burning flesh. Olga was busy tending to Matt, who only seemed to have one leg.

"He's tough," said Olga, "actually used his own belt as a tourniquet."

Matt was sweating profusely and was obviously in great pain. There seemed little left of his right leg below the knee.

"She threw a stun grenade through the window. Then after Monique winged her, she threw something else at us, some sort of anti-personnel weapon." He said.

"He needs to get to a hospital." Said Olga.

"We'll take him." Said Ruby.

Matt gripped the broken wooden frame of the bed and his entire body seemed to contort with pain.

"No," he said, "leave me, the police will be here soon and they'll look after me."

"He's right," said Olga, "we need to leave. Even the Varna police can't ignore a minor war on the outskirts of town."

As in Budapest, it was Olga who got them moving, collecting their things and putting everything into the two vehicles Cynthia and her people had come in.

"Aren't we going to bury them?" Asked Sarah.

"No, we need to leave here and leave quickly." Answered Olga.

In less than ten minutes they had everything they possessed put into the two dark coloured four by fours and only Serge seemed to be wandering about without a purpose.

"This is a nice vehicle," said Spider, "but I'll miss the old merc."

Serge got between Ruby and the rear door of the vehicle she wanted to enter.

"I can't just let you leave as though nothing happened. Roland is dead."

Ruby looked at him and a slight breeze began to ruffle the skin on his face. He jumped back and put his hands up in a show of submission. She had a weapon now, no longer was her gift purely passive.

"You're coming with us of course," said Ruby, "you always were going to join us. Aren't there questions you want answered Serge?"

The sound of police sirens could be heard in the distance. It was a good twenty minutes since the first shot had been fired and the police had finally decided to have a look at what was going on.

"I have my duty," said Serge, "I can't simply run away with you."

"I'm not going to force you Serge, but we need you. Your experience, your knowledge of what I may be and most importantly you have a map that shows the house by the coast. That is where we need to go next."

"It's where they'll expect you to go."

"I know. Get in the other vehicle with Olga and show her the way, please."

They were back to a group of five again. Spider was driving her and in the front vehicle were Sarah and Olga. Serge joined Olga in the front to make their numbers up to five.

"I don't like him." Said Spider.

"I know, but he's useful."

They drove at speed and half a mile down the road they passed three police cars heading towards the house they'd just left.

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