

Ruby V : Machu Picchu

Chapter 11 - Calaso

“Liam muttered a few other things Cal couldn’t quite hear, before wandering off. Cal had already been briefed on Liam, as she’d walked with Ruby, through the streets of Huancayo. She knew he was a member of an extreme religious cult. She also knew he was unlikely to cause them any trouble while they were there.”

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“I’m no expert, but Kurt has come to me in dreams.” Said Ruby. “Memories of Jurgis too, though they often feel like warnings of some kind. Do the dead live on in some way ? I’m not sure, Cal. If your gifts seem permanent, then maybe, just maybe, Kallina passed some of her gifts to you.” Cal was obviously scared and confused, though Ruby didn’t want to answer questions she wasn’t sure about. The world was full of conspiracy theories and the wunderkinds weren’t immune. They couldn’t begin to think of Cal as some kind of reincarnated Kallina. Cal had already been warned to be very careful about what she did in public. There had been a few pictures on YouTube, of Sophie levitating to the top of a tree. Luckily, there were so many fake levitation pictures doing the rounds, that the genuine ones were ignored.

“I think it’s something from when we were in Africa.” Said Cal. “Baba Yaga talked about placing a seed inside me, something to help me.....How it would help ? She was a bit vague about that.”

“Yes, that sounds like Kallina.” Said Ruby. “I’m still trying to understand some of the things she told me when I was twenty.”

“I’ve felt useless for so long, Abe’s puny sister.” Said Cal. “I do hope these gifts are permanent.”

“Spider and Sarah have no special gifts, but no one thinks they’re useless.” Said Ruby.

“Come on Ruby, you know what I mean.”

Ruby did know what she meant, of course she did. Spider and Sarah seemed to have always been there, they’d left Britain with her, when she’d decided to head east, in search of Kurt. That made them special; they’d been with her before she’d found Kallina and the wunderkinds. Cal on the other hand, had arrived as someone’s sister. It couldn’t be easy being a muggle among so many super kids.

“Again, like last time.....Pick something up and move it around the hotel room.” Said Ruby.

“Not my computer though.” Added Todd.

“I’ll be careful.”

Not even a wobble, as Cal pointed her hands at a bowl of fruit and lifted it into the air. Ruby used her hands sometimes, though she suspected there was no need. Kallina needed hand gestures for her witchcraft spells, but the gifts.....Ruby thought hand movement were like Dumbo’s feather. The magic was still there, even when the feather wasn’t. Round the room went the bowl of fruit, until as a final act of bravado, Cal turned the bowl upside down. Slightly spoiled by a guava falling out and bouncing along the carpet. Otherwise, the bowl was placed back on the table, in the same condition as when Cal had used her new gifts to pick it up.

“Oh, sorry about the guava.” Said Cal.

“No apologies, that was amazing.” Said Ruby.

Kallina had thought Cal needed therapy of some kind, after killing two thugs in Baku. It was self-defence; the boys had intended to sell her to traffickers in girls her age. Still, the violence involved,

the way Cal had used the knife..... Ruby had vetoed the idea of therapy, though she had been worried about Cal. Perhaps Kallina had planted a seed of some kind, to help Cal become something other than just someone's harmless sister. The extreme violence might well have been Cal overcompensating for a perceived lack of standing among them.

"I can do this too.....I discovered it by accident." Said Cal.

Using her hands again, pointing an index finger at the dropped guava. The lovely ripe looking fruit, rose into the air, as Cal moved her finger. The hand movements needed investigating; it might imply a different type of gifts to those used by the others. Cal blinked, just a very pronounced and slow blink, like the kind often used by Constanze. The guava vanished and Todd actually applauded.

"Brilliant.....Where did it go to ?" Asked Todd.

"I have no idea.....A paperback book vanished, by accident." Said Cal. "I was just moving it about and.....It was gone."

There had been a feel about the guava moving about; it had been the same as when Ruby moved objects. That eye blink though, that had been something else.

"Can you get the fruit back ?" Asked Ruby.

Cal gave a sort of shrug and Ruby felt scared. No wonder Kallina had kept the gifted children away from the world for decade after decade. All that power, without the discipline needed to use it safely.....

"You must know where it is." Said Todd.

"No, I don't."

"First things first, we need to see exactly what you can do." Said Ruby. "I suspect you're using something hybrid, a mixture of wunderkind gifts and Kallina's witchcraft. Luckily, there is a safe place where we can let you use your new gifts. I shouldn't need to tell you.....How important it is to be very careful of how you use these powers."

"Oh, I will be.....No using them on people." Said Cal. "I do understand Ruby, I'm determined not to hurt anyone."

It wasn't exactly Oppenheimer's destroyer or worlds speech, but it would have to do and the girl felt sincere.

"I have chores to do, yes even I have chores." Said Ruby. "Come with me and after the chores, we can visit the safe house I mentioned. Underground with sound proof walls.....An ideal place for you to practise. There will be someone else there, but I can't see him being a problem."

"I want to crush a dumpster, like Abe did." Said Cal.

"The really clever thing, is un-crushing it afterwards." Said Ruby. "As a long term project, I want you to find the guava and bring it back, if you can."

"I'll do my best, Ruby."

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"Of course Sophie will know we're watching her." Said Eugenie. "Others won't notice though, the potential bad guys."

"To me at least.....It'd be far easier to join Sophie and Caleb." Said Lorenzo. "It could be fun, like an all-day double date."

Eugenie sighed, though she knew he understood. His teasing of her antics regarding the other wunderkinds, could be relentless. Was it a bit over the top, them following Sophie, just in case something happened ? Maybe just a little, but it would keep Ruby happy and she was in charge.

"But if we joined them, someone would need to watch our backs." She said. "Sometimes Lol, I wonder if, as a baby, you were dropped on your head."

“Oi.”

A play fight became a long kiss in a shop doorway. When they’d finished, Sophie had gone, taking Caleb with her. Not a problem, she could tell where Sophie had gone. There was a mental glow coming from one of the speciality food shops.

“Where did they go ?” Asked Lorenzo.

“I can see her; we can all see each other.” Said Eugenie. “Just a bit of a glow in my mind, but I could track her across a large city.”

“And she can see you ?”

“Yes, of course she can, Lol.”

“Maybe it’s me, Eugenie.....But something about all this sounds a little crazy.”

“I’m just obeying orders.” She replied.

Such a perfect straight line, the ideal feed to get sarcastic about. It was too good, Lol looked lost for words. She took the opportunity to pull him carefully through the traffic and across the road. The mixture of odours coming from the store, was mesmerising.

“Oh, we’ll have a long wait; Sophie has found a new cheese store.” She said.

“I never knew she was that into cheese.”

Eugenie could just about see Sophie through the window. She was talking to Caleb and getting him to taste a sample of some kind of cheese. To Eugenie cheese was just a way of paying good money for milk that had gone off. To Sophie though, it was almost the food of the Gods.

“She got hooked on fancy cheese while in Tallinn.” She said. “She was there to help break Spider out of jail. All of them were stuck there for a few days and a very bored Sophie, discovered a boutique cheese emporium.....The rest, as they say, is history.”

“I learn something about you guys every day.” Said Lorenzo. “Spider being in jail.....Who saw that coming ?”

“Hey, he’s a good guy.”

A little tussle developed and a kiss, which caused a passing woman with a toddler, to smile at them. Two young people sharing a moment of mildly inappropriate public intimacy.

“We should move away a little, I only need to see the door.” She said. “Who comes and goes, that sort of thing.”

Moving a few yards, also gave them the privacy of a narrow alley with a few cheesy smelling bins. Eugenie put her arms around Lol’s neck and gave him a long and intimate kiss. She’d been wanting to do it since.....The last time, which hadn’t been that long ago.

“How long is Sophie likely to be in there ?” Asked Lol.

“Could be an hour.....Not complaining are you ?”

“Oh, No.”

They kissed again, while Eugenie kept part of her mind watching Sophie and at least one eye on the door of the fancy cheese store.

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Ruby really did have a few quite mundane things to do; though calling them chores was a little misleading. Much against her better judgement, Ruby had called Darius T Weisbaum, the CIA’s head of operations in Western Europe. He’d been helpful, despite Peru being a long way outside of his official remit. She’d noticed his voice change at the mention of the mysterious colonel, who appeared to run a religious cult. Not much had been said over the phone, though a day later, she’d received an email to be at a certain place at a certain time. All typical old school CIA, even a warning to tell no one.....

“Alright, we’ve got the coffee Todd likes.....Next we’ll meet the CIA messenger.” Ruby said.

“Who ?” Asked Cal.

Wide eyed and excited, bringing Cal had been a good idea. It would give her a good idea of how Cal reacted to mild stress in social situations. There was also a chance that the girl might notice something, which she’d missed. Ruby liked to think that was unlikely, but Cal did seem to have some serious special gifts.

“We’re meeting a CIA contact, Cal.” She said. “A tall black guy called Darren. He’ll be wearing jeans and a plain white T shirt. He has a jiffy bag for me.....Plus he might want to talk, I’m not sure.”

“Wow, do I have to wait somewhere ?” Asked Cal.

“No, I want you there.....Read him, Cal....Inside his mind if you can. Body language if you can’t. Everyone gives away more than they know, or intend.”

“Where are we meeting him ?”

“Here.....In about five minutes from now.” Said Ruby.

The Centro Médico Municipal Huancayo, the local medical centre. Not much to look at from the outside, but such places rarely are. Lots of green and white paintwork, all clean and looking very medical. Ruby had no idea how many people went through the doors every day, but it had to be a huge number. That made it the perfect place to meet Darren. Ruby stopped, just inside the main doors.

“Do you feel anything, Cal ? Anyone thinking about us ?”

Ruby opened her mind to everyone in about a square mile radius and chaos entered her mind. For a full two minutes, she went through all the thoughts of others, looking for anyone especially interested in her and Cal. There was never complete certainty with mental skills, but Ruby was pretty sure no one was following them. Cal was shaking her head and looking sad.

“Sorry.....I only feel the misery of a child who just dropped his ice cream.” Said Cal. “I’m sure I’ll get better with a little practice.”

“Or your gifts may be more physical than mental.” Said Ruby. “We’re still finding out what you can do and physical skills are incredibly useful.”

No one asked them where they were going, or even approached them. It was the same in hospitals all over the world and it always surprised her. Maybe she’d developed a jaundiced view of the world, but simply letting people wander about where they wanted....Ruby had to smile when she remembered they had no legitimate reason to be there. The relaxed attitude to access, was a huge part of the appeal of such public buildings.

“Is that him ?” Asked Cal.

Tall, black and carrying a large brown jiffy bag. The man was even dressed in the pre-advised blue jeans and T shirt. He was looking at the selection in a hospital vending machine. Was it going to be a quick and fairly clandestine hand over of information ? Ruby wasn’t sure; the encrypted email hadn’t given that many details. She delved into his mind at a fairly shallow level. Nothing that he’d feel or likely to leave any side effects.

“Yes, that’s Darren.” Said Ruby.

As he turned and saw them, he smiled. A huge smile, for a moment she was worried he might try and hug her. She looked into his mind and realised he’d learned about her on a course. The CIA actually taught courses about the wunderkinds and their time in North Korea. Darren kept thinking she was legendary and how great it was to meet her. It was all a bit too much, so she stopped looking into his mind.

“You must be.....Darren.” She said.

“Yes, and this is for you, Ruby.”

The envelope was quite heavy and had something hard in it, as well as what was probably a printed report. Darren would know, but she didn't want to look into his mind again. That much mental gushing.....

"We should sit for a moment." Said Darren. "There are instructions to go with the package."

It could have been a waiting room in any hospital in the world. Two vending machines and a few rows of seats. Ruby sat with Darren, while Cal fed change into the vending machine. The girl always seemed to have a pocket full of change. Darren leant towards her.....A weird moment to suddenly become clandestine. It occurred to her that he might be a new recruit to the local CIA office.

"I haven't got that much to tell you, just....."

"You wanted these, but didn't have enough change." Said Cal.

A packet of peanuts covered in chocolate, Cal dropped them into his lap. Ruby would never have done it, but it was a brilliant move. Hearing what people can do is one thing, but seeing it close up....Darren looked at Cal with a mixture of awe and fear. It seemed Cal's gifts weren't purely physical after all.

"Thank you." He said.

"So, what are my instructions?" Asked Ruby.

"Go through everything in the package and then get in touch with our people in Lima. There are contact details included in the package. I was told to say the next meeting needs to be in Lima, probably at the American Embassy on Avenida La Encalada. It will be a person to person meeting with someone senior in our organisation."

"It may be a few weeks until I'm back in Lima." Said Ruby.

"I can't see that being a problem."

Probably not, they were probably working out who got an invite to meet the legendary Ruby Mason. It was all a bit much and actually a relief to remember the next chore on her list. A cream for Lily to rub on the eczema on her legs, it was flaring up again.

"Next, Cal.....We need a pharmacy."

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"Look Abe.....Cal has a few gifts now, probably passed on to her by Kallina. If you cause trouble in London, your sister will want to come and look for you...You know she will. Do you want to screw up her life, just as something huge happens to her, something good?" Asked Monique.

"No of course not.....But I can't just sit in Ruby's flat forever." Said Abe.

Monique could understand, Abe and his sister had been close, relying on each other in Somalia. Abe liked to talk about those days as him taking care of Cal. The reality often appeared to be different, with Cal getting him out of all sorts of trouble. He'd arrived in London and the first thing he sees, is his sister vanishing. It was beyond weird, even Monique was still slightly in shock.

"We do realise this must be difficult for you." Said Nazili.

"Yes, it's difficult.....But don't be a huge dick about it.....Ok." Said Monique.

Abe smiled at her and she looked into his mind, just a little. He was sincere, Monique was sure of it. Abshir Duale, Abe....Would behave himself, at least for now. He wasn't like the other wunderkinds; he'd never been found by Kurt and Kallina. His first loyalties were always going to be to others from home, from Somalia. He could probably walk out into the night and have somewhere to stay within an hour, maybe two. The trick was going to be keeping him busy with something genuinely useful.

Monique currently had no idea how to do that, but she'd come up with something.

"Chris was a good friend to Cal." Said Nazili. "We're keeping her on to look after you."

“She’s nice.....Invite her to watch movies with you and eat pizza, and she’ll be a friend for life.”
Added Monique.

“I’ve been sat in prison for months.” Said Abe. “I need something to do, or I’ll go crazy.”

“There are restrictions on what you can do.....As a refugee.” Said Nazili.

Monique loved Nazili, even if he did look weird when naked. He’d been an Arbiter of his people though, a law maker and law enforcer. That tended to mean he was a sucker for mindless bureaucracy. Sometimes it was endearing, though it could be also be irritating.

“Paid employment is out of the question.” Said Monique. “We’ve no intention of paying you, though the cash drawer in the bedroom will always be topped up. Call it reimbursement of incidentals.....Anyway; I need to discuss you with Ruby. Be sure though, we will come up with a way to keep you busy.”

“Great.....Anything will do, I’m not fussy.” Said Abe.

It was difficult; he was too bright to be given any modern equivalent of whitewashing rocks. Abe needed some kind of genuine job, or he’d get restless. It was probably why he kept getting into trouble. Monique was determined to keep him busy.

“By the way, where is the cat ?” Asked Abe. “Cal was always writing to me about Constanze.”

“The cat is also in Peru.” Said Nazili.

“Wow, that is weird.” Said Abe.

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“Cal.....This is Liam, Liam Thornton.” Said Ruby. “He’s.....Now sort of on our side.”

“I am most definitely, not on your side.” Said Liam.

“We know all about the Colonel.....I have friends in the CIA.” Said Ruby.

“Rubbish, fake news.” Yelled Liam.

Liam muttered a few other things Cal couldn’t quite hear, before wandering off. Cal had already been briefed on Liam, as she’d walked with Ruby, through the streets of Huancayo. She knew he was a member of an extreme religious cult. She also knew he was unlikely to cause them any trouble while they were there. According to Ruby the colonel was the key to many things and likely to be someone they’d need to see. Cal had yet to understand the subtle differences in Ruby’s voice. Seeing the colonel might mean a friendly conversation, or it might mean destroying him and his organisation. That would come later.....For now, Cal was there to use the facilities.

“You must try a smile on Liam before we leave.” Said Ruby. “Nothing too strong, we need him conscious and coherent.”

“I’m not sure if I can even do a special smile.” Said Cal.

“Oh, I’m sure you can.....Come on, we’re going to use the big room.”

Ruby took her into the room where interrogations had taken place. She’d already been warned about the bloodstained floor and filthy walls. There was an odour too, of far too many people, crowded into a small space. It was horrible, but Cal could sense it had all happened a long time ago.

“The place was almost in moth balls, before it was loaned to us.” Said Ruby.

“It’s still there.....All that suffering is locked into the bricks, the fabric of the building.”

“If it’s too distracting ? I can find you somewhere else to practise.” Said Ruby.

“No.....It’s awful, but I can draw it in and use it.” Said Cal.

Ruby smiled, held her hand and took her over to the far side of the big room, as she called it. There was a line of six battered old filing cabinets. The heavy metal ones so beloved of office workers over the years. Even Cal had seen quite a few, in public buildings in Mogadishu.

“Not a dumpster, not yet.” Said Ruby. “Pick one of these and crush it. Then un-crush it to my satisfaction; all the drawers have to open. Do one every time we come here and.....I’ll buy you a brand new dumpster to crush.”

“And I can make as much noise as I want ?” Asked Cal.

“Yes, go crazy.”

Cal chose the cabinet that still had a phone list stuck on the side. Someone in the past had decided they needed a list of people in the office they called most, their favourite extensions. There it still was, though most of it was now illegible. Olivia was still readable, who’d once had extension four three eight, somewhere.

“This one.” Said Cal.

Old and a little rusty, but still very solid. Cal gave it a shove and it refused to move. Solid and heavy, Ruby had set up a worthy test for her crushing skills. Opening the bottom drawer, revealed what was left of a long dead rodent, probably a mouse. Cal closed the drawer and moved back a few paces. Liam was there, leaning on the wall. He was weird, though it was actually quite nice to have an audience.

“What’s she going to do ?” Asked Liam.

“This !” Shouted Cal.

Cal closed her eyes, she’d already memorised where the cabinet was. First she thought of crushing the sides, all four sides at once. It was easier that way, a nice steady uniform pressure. The sound of metal being crushed, meant the ideas in her mind, were happening in the real world. She remembered something Kallina had said about magic being a way to alter reality. It made sense, even for gifts that weren’t strictly anything to do with magic.

Un-crushing had to be a challenge, if she wanted to impress Ruby. Cal kept up the steady pressure, until she heard something go pop. A quick look at the cabinet confirmed it was still upright, though it was bent over to the left. It was also taking up a lot less space than it had been. What had popped ? Cal had no idea.

“Do I have to un-crush it ?”

“Yes, or you can’t move on to harder tests.” Said Ruby.

Cal closed her eyes again. It was difficult to do a perfect job of crushing, yet leave something un-crushable. Success at one, might mean failure at the other. Still....Cal was determined to make the cabinet as small and condensed as was possible. Top to bottom now, though pushing up from below, felt weird and counter intuitive. Cal pressed down just from the top, until the mangled metal sound, began to fade. Another quick look and.....The cabinet was a bit pear shaped. That would never do. Eyes wide open she used her gifts to lift the cabinet, right up until it touched the ceiling, a good twenty feet above them. Liam actually made a gasping noise. Cal used all her mental strength to grab the cabinet. Strangely, the forces in her mind made her arms hurt, as though she was really holding onto it. Down it came, with all the force she could bring to bear. The cabinet slammed into the concrete floor, dislodging quite a lot of dirt and congealed blood.

“Hmmm the size is about right.” Said Cal.

“A bit pear shaped.” Added Ruby.

For some reason Liam found that funny and he began to chuckle. Cal felt tired and there still the un-crushing to look forward to. The cabinet was now taking up the space of a single drawer, before she’d begun her crushing and slamming it into the floor. She pressed on the sides with her mind, until there was another popping sound. A piece of a drawer was sticking up. Cal crushed it back in on itself and finally, liked what she saw. It was going to be hell to turn it back into a filing cabinet.

“Are you happy it’s properly crushed ?” Asked Cal.

“You people are crazy.” Muttered Liam.

Ruby walked around it, even running her hand of the top. If she wanted it crushed a little more, Cal was out of ideas. It might mean bending the rules to use a sledge hammer. Eventually Ruby looked at her and smiled.

“Perfect.....Now un-crush it.” Said Ruby.

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Ellie had several different places she liked to work. The tent on the tree line was fairly new, but eventually, someone always realised where she was. Not really hiding of course....Sometimes her work required a little privacy.

“When does she arrive ?” Asked Mars.

Ellie Nicholas knew who she meant, the arrival of Ruby Mason and her group was one of the main parts of just about every conversation in the dig site. New accommodation had been ordered and proper chemical toilets. The latrine pits would soon be filled in and relegated to history. Ellie hadn’t mentioned it was all due to Ruby’s money arriving in the bank, but everyone had guessed. Best of all from Ellie’s point of view, there had been enough of a budget to send Fiona on a proper first aid course in Jauja. There was even enough in the contingency pot, to buy decent medical kit to make the course worthwhile. Her group of student diggers wouldn’t be ready for a major disaster, but they might get through a minor one.

“I’m not certain of a date; though I’m sure it will be soon.” Said Ellie.

“Jim looked her up; she’s some high level finance lady from London.” Said Mars.

Marseille was the girl’s full first name, which no one used, probably not even her mother. A French citizen from Lyon, who spoke perfect English. Mars had hair dyed bright red and had arrived with definite views on the evil patriarchy. It wasn’t unusual; Ellie had seen and heard it all before. Once Mars had started sleeping with Jim, her views on men had mellowed slightly. Biology always wins, always. Ellie was thinking of writing that on the refectory wall.

Jim was about twenty, the same age as Mars. He was an English student from Oswestry in Shropshire. The dig site was a league of nation, they usually were. It was fun and eventually, everyone worked out who spoke which language. There were a few problematic flaws with Mars. She was intelligent, nose-y and had an overdeveloped busy body gene.

“Her background is none of our concern; she won’t be here that long.” Said Ellie.

“How long ?”

All the student were like that, to a degree. Mars was the worst though. Give her one piece of information and she’d ask at least another half a dozen questions. Being the pompous professor sometimes worked on the university campus, but not in muddy dig sites. Ellie had been tempted to send the girl on the first aid course, instead of Fiona. Give her enough cash for a bed and breakfast in Jauja and let her take Jim with her. After considering it, Ellie had decided Mars was best kept somewhere she could keep an eye on her. Ignoring direct questions might work on TV, but they didn’t have Mars in the cast.

“The new Austrian girl, swears she saw police further up the mountain.....With dogs.” Said Mars.

“Ruby does know people in the government.” Said Ellie. “Important people, who might be making sure she’s going to be safe here.”

That did it, Mars was wide eyed and in full curiosity mode. The sort of girl designed for social media, who’d know every detail about the Kardashians. It seemed almost a waste to have all that energy, effectively trapped in a muddy dig site.

"Who does she know?" Asked Mars. "Does she know the president?"

"Don't drown her in questions when she gets here." Said Ellie. "I'm sure you don't want all our nice new things, to have to go back in the box."

"No, of course not, Ellie."

"Then don't upset her.....Tell the others, we need to make sure Ruby is happy here."

"Oh, I will.....I heard we'll be getting better food." Said Mars.

"Yes.....So, don't screw it up."

"I won't.....Can I get you anything?" Asked Mars.

"Is there decent coffee in the mess tent?"

"I can make you some." Said Mars.

Mars was off, to make the first coffee anyone had ever offered to make fresh. Ellie was beginning to wonder if her whole style of management had been flawed.

"Maybe I just need to threaten to take their toys away." She muttered.

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The filing cabinets had been in the building, and now never used. Ruby had bought them from DINI for a few Sols. The equivalent of a few pounds each, added to her bill for Liam's room and board. Ruby did want Cal to succeed, or there was a risk of losing so much potential. The filing cabinet looked bad, very bad. Ruby would have needed to use all her skills to stretch it out again. As for the drawers.....

"I'll let you off the drawers opening." Said Ruby. "I think the top one was already jammed shut."

"I'll take you up on that for the others." Said Cal. "This one though, the first.....It has to be perfect."

Liam was still there, though he did have a habit of wandering off. Ruby had locked the door at the bottom of the stairs, so he wasn't going anywhere. He was watching them, as if wondering what craziness they were about to get up to. Cal was simply looking at the crushed cabinet.

"Your brother imagined himself in there, inside the filthy dumpster." Said Ruby. "Not sure if it helps.....He had to think of being among the rubbish, including used.....You know."

"Condoms.....I know, I was there." Said Cal. "Imagine you're in there and push outwards."

Liam obviously found condoms a funny word and laughed for a while. Cal was still looked at the filing cabinet, with a look of deep concentration.

"Yes.....I understand now." Muttered Cal.

Ruby first felt raw power around her, the kind Baba Yaga had used so expertly. The noises from the cabinet began quite quickly, as it began to expand. It was almost as if a tiny strong person was inside the drawers, punching outwards. First there were bulges, which grew and grew. By the time the cabinet was back to its original height, Ruby knew Cal was going to succeed. Not with wunderkind gifts, but with the powers used by Baba Yaga, the crazy witch of the woods, the deathless one. Only she was dead.....Unless. Ruby wondered if deathless meant being able to pass her skills onto another?

"I'll be honest, Cal." Said Ruby. "I couldn't have got to this point, so quickly. You just need to free up the drawers."

"Shush.....I need to concentrate." Said Cal.

Only the voice didn't sound like Cal's, she'd never be so rude. Cal briefly glared at her, with very old eyes. Ruby wasn't about to totally believe, not yet. The voice though, those old eyes. It really did appear that something of the ancient witch, had been passed on. Cal actually said a few words in a language Kallina sometimes used.

"No.....That's impossible." Said Liam. "You people must be agents of Lucifer."

It was as if fingers were pressing on the inside of the metal. Ruby could almost see fingerprints, as the cabinet began to look almost as it had before Cal had begun to crush it. If it was in a second hand store, it's unlikely anyone would want to buy it.....But it looked like a filing cabinet again, just. Cal still seemed to be doing something; there was still the occasional noise of tortured metal. Eventually the sounds stopped and Cal walked towards the cabinet. The bottom drawer squealed, but it opened.

"Well done.....That's amazing." Said Ruby.

The next drawer up took a lot of pulling and it came out at a bit of an angle. It did open though, as did the one above it. Onto the last, the top drawer and Ruby seemed to remember it being jammed. It might have once been locked of course, the key lost decades ago. Cal tugged at the handle and the drawer refused to budge.

"We'll call this a success." Said Ruby. "I think the top drawer was jammed when the cabinet arrived." Cal held her hand up to silence her, the second such piece of rudeness that day. Ruby was determined not to spoil Cal's moment of success.....But later, there would be a few words on the subject.

"It's locked, I can feel the lock." Said Cal.

Just a single loud bang and when Cal pulled the drawer, it opened. Ruby actually applauded and despite thinking there was something satanic about them, Liam also applauded. It was a great moment and it meant Cal was going to be very useful. Provided she remained with Ruby of course, she was free to do as she pleased once her immigration status was settled.

"I saw that.....And I don't believe it." Said Liam.

"Sorry for being a bit of a brat, Ruby.....It was just...."

"Stress, Cal.....It can turn us all into monsters." Said Ruby. "You're forgiven. If you feel up to it, there is time to have a chat with Liam?"

"Yes, let's sort him out." Said Cal.

Poor Liam, after what he'd seen.....He was obviously more than a little worried.

"What ?.....Don't start crushing me."

"No one is going to hurt you." Said Ruby. "Let's use the room where they serve your meals."

It was a nice room, designed and furnished as a dining room for a large number of inmates. It smelt of breakfast and coffee, which was nice after the odour of blood and unwashed bodies. Liam sat in his seat, the place where he sat to eat his meals. Ruby leant against a wall, allowing Cal to carry out the very informal and relaxed, interrogation.

"I like you both.....But I'm not helping you." Said Liam. "Ask me anything.....You won't necessarily get an answer."

"Oh, and I thought we might be friends." Said Cal.

Cal had watched it done a few times and she had to know the routine. Give the subject a gentle smile to get them on your side, before using key words to get the information you wanted. The CIA knew almost nothing about the Colonel, not even his name. They had three possible names, all ex Special Forces. Even the notes by a CIA operations manager, said all three of them might not be the guy. No idea of family, or where he lived, or even where he trained up new recruits to the cause. The Colonel was a mystery and in his head somewhere, Liam probably had a few clues to his identity. Cal seemed determined to go straight for the top grade information, the real gold.

"Names, Liam.....Tell me a few names?" Cal asked. "Who do you go to meetings with? I'm assuming there must be meetings?"

Using names as a key word just angered Liam, to the point where he threatened to have nothing further to do with them. They were the spawn of Satan after all, as he kept telling them. Meetings was unlikely to have been a choice as a key word, Cal probably got lucky. Liam seemed to have no problem talking about meetings with his two new satanic buddies.

“We have meetings..... Of course we have meetings. We’ve used a few places, but for the last year or so, we’ve used the cabins near the lake.”

It was a Eureka moment and Ruby was tempted to take over from Cal. She’d done well though; she’d earned another triumph that day. Ruby was pulling Two Pines Lake out of Liam’s head and knew Cal had to be seeing it too.

“You must mean the cabins near Two Pines Lake.” Said Cal.

“That’s the place.” Said Liam. “No one goes there much these days, too far away from the new road. Perfect for us.....The Colonel says that, the location is perfect.”

Ruby saw the picture of the Colonel in Liam’s head and memorised it. No name to go with the middle aged white male face; it was likely Liam knew him as simply the Colonel. There was a location for the lake though, complete with the number of miles from Bridgeport. West Virginia, of course it was, a quiet lake out in the seemingly endless woods. It was strange that Liam refused to give names, but quite happily provided details of where the Colonel had his base of operations. It was like that sometimes, you just got lucky.

“What goes on at the usual meetings ?” Asked Cal.

Could you call someone a cornucopia of information ? If you could, it was Liam. No names, but lots of faces in his mind, of his fellow minions at various meetings. Ruby would write a report after talking to Cal. It was the CIA’s case now, though they’d probably let Homeland Security deal with matters near Bridgeport. Ruby was interested in what Liam was up to in Peru, but West Virginia was someone else’s problem. It was a world away.....And as she kept telling Todd, they were on holiday.

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