

Christmas in Glasgow

'A short story from the Ruby universe. The 2024 festive season approaches for Sarah and Spider, who have a brand new baby boy. A good year in many ways, though a call from Glasgow threatens to upset their lives.....

A short tale of about 11,400 words.'

'Wunderkind - A person who achieves great success when relatively young.'

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Ruby had arranged the job for Spider, something legit with deductions for things like tax and national insurance. There were even paid holidays and sick pay, as long as he didn't overdo it. "Something in finance, you'll love it." Ruby had told him. "Go for the interview and I'm sure they'll make you an offer."

Jones & Argyle turned out to be lenders of last resort. Brokers really, who obtained funds for companies considered too big to be allowed to fail. Consortium lending with no one bank risking their necks by picking up the entire debt. In many ways, the old Etonians who ran Jones & Argyle, reminded him of Harry, the loan shark. Spider had collected debts for Harry, often by the threat of extreme violence. Sometimes the threat had to become a reality. Apart from not having a baseball bat in the boot of his car, much of his new legit job, felt similar to his old, far from legit job. His phone rang, Sarah's number coming up on the screen.

"Morning sweet thing.....Everything alright?" Asked Spider.

"Can you talk?"

"I should have a few minutes.....Talk to me, you sound a bit vexed." Said Spider.

Vexed wasn't part of his usual vocabulary. Spider had heard one of the girls in the office use the word and he'd thought it sounded cool. Spider was in a car park, waiting for the lawyer of an AI development company, to come out of the barbers just over the road. Spider had heard that there was a lot of interest in financing AI, as long as it was using someone else's cash. Following the lawyer was just part of his plan for the day. It was similar to a day working for Harry, but no one got hit with a baseball bat.

"Who is Leilani?" Asked Sarah.

A time bomb from his past would have been truthful, one he'd been waiting to go off. Her name had cropped up before and he'd said she was just someone from his past; a friend of his late mother. Accurate as far as it went, but Sarah was now the mother of his son. He wasn't about to lie to her. For one thing, it might ruin Christmas if she found out.

"Did she call?" Asked Spider.

"Yes, said she got your new home number from George Polandrous. Who is she?"

"My sister, Sarah.....Actually my half-sister." Said Spider. "Same mother, different father. My mother is dead now, but after leaving my father, she remarried. Just one child from the marriage, my sister.....Leilani."

"Crap.....You never told me anything about a sister." Said Sarah.

"I always thought of my half-sister as a part of my past." Said Spider. "Plus, her family had a running feud with mine.....Asian families aren't big on divorce. To be honest.....I always thought Leilani would turn up one day. I'm assuming she had a reason to call?"

Spider had been christened Rupert Bailey. Half British, his father had been a tall Scotsman, who'd spent most of his life in the army. Spider remembered a strong Scottish accent. Even years away from his Scottish past, his father had still sounded as though he'd just got off the train from Glasgow. The other half of Rupert Bailey had been a very small and energetic mother from India.

"Your sister sounded so upset." Said Sarah. "I'm sure she was crying.....She's in some kind of trouble and needs you to call her. You have to call her."

"I will.....Tonight, after we've eaten and settled Baby George down." Said Spider.

Their tiny baby son had been christened George Rupert Bailey. It seemed Sarah had once promised George Polandrous, that she'd name her first child after him, even if it was a girl. The middle name Rupert seemed to be because Sarah was half crazy. His fault really, he had agreed to go with any name his, then new wife, wanted.

"Must go.....The guy I'm following just reappeared." Said Spider.

"Alright.....Do you fancy Thai food tonight?"

"Sounds wonderful."

The lawyer came out of the barbers and his brand new haircut, didn't look much different to the one he'd gone in with. Spider might be following the guy for days, noting who he saw and what occurred. Jones & Argyle were fussy about who they helped, no drug money or anything shady would be signed off. Some lenders of last resort had been less fussy and they no longer traded. Any hint of a connection with mob money and the AI company would be told to go elsewhere.

"Oh.....Leilani." Spider muttered. "Why did you have to choose to call me, the week before Christmas."

The newly barbered lawyer left his car in the car park. The guy seemed to be doing the rest of his journey on foot. Spider left his own BMW in the car park and followed him, at a discrete distance. Eventually Spider would come back to the barbers, to ask if the guy had met anyone while there. Spider quite enjoyed his new life, but if he was being totally honest.....Though he'd never mention it to Sarah. He did sometimes miss the simplicity of simply thumping someone, to find out what he needed to know.

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"Crap yeah, you have a kid now." Said Leilani. "You always said to call you if there was a problem I couldn't fix. But as you're now a dad.....I'll be alright, Spider. Forget I called and we'll catch up on things next year. February.....I'll call you in February."

Far too late for his sister to back away from the conversation, much too late. If she really had caused Roddie Aitken to hate her, she might not be alive in February. Spider had prior dealings with Roddie; he'd even worked for him a couple of times. Spider had obtained documents for Roddie, usually locked away in solicitors' offices. That had been in Spider's burglary period; he'd actually been rather good at it. Roddie Aitken was what the police called a criminal mastermind, a major player in the Glasgow underworld. Spider had heard Roddie now made his big money from loan sharking and selling illegal weapons. It used to be that the local hoodlums went out with a machete under their jacket. Now, it was more likely to be an Uzi.

"I'm not going to pretend this call never happened." Said Spider. "I promised.....I promised someone I'd be there, watching your back."

Sarah was in the room, though she was sat some distance away. He could have asked her for privacy, though he'd had suffered for that....Probably until the next ice age. Easier to let her hear what was said and explain it all later.

"Mum.....You promised mum, didn't you?" Asked his sister.

“Yes, I promised mum.”

“I knew it.....She always thought I was a total head case.” Said Leilani.

“It’s not that.....Mum just knew what I was doing for a living.” Said Spider. “She knew that if it came to it, I’d do anything to protect you.....Even from yourself.”

“Just another way of calling me a nut job.” Said Leilani. “If it was just me, I wouldn’t have called. It’s the sprog.....Roddie thinks she turned informer and told the police a few of his secrets.”

“Fuck.” Said Spider.

The sprog was still a child in his mind, but Mira had to be fifteen now. More than old enough to be working for Roddie in one of his various interests. Drugs probably, Roddie was into supplying designer drugs to the citizens of Glasgow. Of course he was, he’d have sold his own mother if the price was right. Mira was an unintended result of his sister having a relationship with a guy she barely knew. Where was the father of the sprog now ? Spider didn’t know, or care.

“You know Roddie, he’s old school.” Said Spider. “No one is worse than a grass.....He’ll have already given someone the job of dealing with Mira. No hurry, but let the family know well in advance. Roddie is torturing you in his own sadistic way.”

“Alright, Rupert.....Maybe I do need your help.”

Spider hated his given name. A boy who was half white and half Indian, living in Glasgow. Rupert had been his mum’s idea and she’d meant well. Spider had learned to fight the school bullies at a very early age. Not an ideal name for the army either; Rupert was used as a derogatory term for posh officers who didn’t have a clue.

“I need to ask Sarah.” Said Spider.

He didn’t even have time to put his phone down.

“Tell her we’re on our way.” Said Sarah.

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Driving rather than flying, it made it easier to take everything Baby George needed. His bottles seemed to require a small chemical plant to keep them clean. Then there were the truly huge numbers of disposable nappies. As for his two buggies and.....It was easier to get it all in the car and drive to Glasgow. A long journey of over four hundred miles, about seven and a half hours with no stops. There was no such thing as no stops, if you were travelling with a tiny baby.

Spider was hoping to do the trip in less than twelve hours, with quite a few nappy changing and feeding stops. Taking it in turns to drive, it wasn’t that bad a journey. They’d just stopped at Leicester Forest services on the M1. Sarah had made a call to Ruby while they’d had breakfast.

“I really didn’t want to tell Ruby.” Said Sarah. “I tell her about every hiccup in our lives.....It always feels as though I’m checking in with mum.”

“I’m sure she doesn’t see it like that.” Said Spider.

Was he telling her the truth, or just trying to keep her happy ? Once Sarah recognised his attempts at gas lighting, but now he was better at it. The father of her child might well be trying to keep her sweet. After all, they did still have a lot of hours together in the car. Sarah gave Spider the benefit of the doubt and smiled at him.

“There was talk of sending.....Help.” Said Sarah. “Someone with a few gifts, just in case things turn nasty in Glasgow. I left it that if it looked fairly bad, I’d call her.”

“Sophie.....I bet if we need someone, she’ll send Sophie.” Said Spider.

They had a weird relationship. Sophie had threatened to beat Spider up, on numerous occasions.

She’d also put herself at risk, rescuing him from a prison in Tallinn. They argued a lot, but seemed to

have a lot of mutual respect. On the whole, Sarah hoped that if they did need help, it would be Sophie.

"Of course.....My sister will want us to stay at her place." Said Spider.

"We talked about this and the hotel is booked." Said Sarah. "They even have a nanny service, to look after Baby George while we're out. Far safer than living in that house, with the threat of violence hovering over it."

They'd already argued about it twice and Spider had lost both times. Sarah didn't think he was after a rematch; he was probably just trying to support his sister.

"I know you're right.....Just be nice to Leilani." Said Spider. "She'll be feeling a bit fragile."

"Of course I'll be nice, I'm nice to everyone."

That made them both smile. Sarah was still famous at the college she'd attended, though maybe infamous was a better word. She'd actually had a final warning for aggressive language. Ruby had attended the same college. It was her Sarah had been yelling at.

Baby George was in his carry cot, which he went everywhere in. Sarah kissed his cheek and was rewarded by his happy gurgling sound.

"Come on.....We've still a long way to go." Said Sarah.

She grabbed the handle on the carry cot, while Spider picked up a large bag. At least ninety percent of everything in that bag, was related to looking after Baby George.

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Everyone celebrated Christmas in one way or another. No matter what your faith, even if you had no faith at all. Families had a Christmas tree in the lounge and Christmas cards on the mantelpiece. Jewish people had lights up in their windows. Muslims told their children to be good, or Santa wouldn't bring them any presents. The whole world seemed caught up in a huge conspiracy; involving Santa Claus and watching the King on Christmas day.....

"Damn crowds.....I'll be glad when it's all over." Said Leilani.

"I dunno.....The Wagtail has a live group for Christmas Eve." Said Mira.

Leilani wasn't totally anti the whole festive season business. It was nice to see people smiling more and being a little nicer than usual. True, it only lasted for a few days, but it was still nice. The Pied Wagtail was their local pub, though it hadn't been the Pied Wagtail for about ten years. The brewery had renamed it several times, but to the locals.....It would always be the Wagtail.

"Who have they got.....Anyone famous?" Asked Leilani.

"Just Gavin and his mates.....They do sound alright, mum." Said Mira.

Leilani sighed, but would probably go and listen to Gav and his mates. For years there'd been Frank for Christmas and New Year at the Wagtail. Frank on the organ, which the locals had inevitably called Wank on his organ. Frank hadn't been bad, but he'd eventually succumbed to old age and arthritis.

"Be friendly when we get there.....No giving Roddie any lip." Said Leilani. "You haven't known him as long as I have, he can be really dangerous."

"What....Roddie? He's a pussy cat."

Leilani actually wanted to slap her daughter, but resisted the urge. Roddie Aitken liked pretty girls and it had to be admitted, her daughter was pretty. Business came first though, with Roddie and Leilani had seen a few girls end up looking a lot less pretty. Some had even ended up dead.

"Just be nice.....No being rude.....Alright?" Asked Leilani.

"Yeah.....Yeah, I get it."

Young pretty and no threat to Roddie's crooked business empire. Of course her daughter wasn't scared of Roddie. Leilani hoped her daughter didn't find out the hard way, that Roddie wasn't always

so friendly. The Ritzy wouldn't be busy until after dark, but it still opened to sell drinks to the lunchtime trade. The Dundas Ritzy, but everyone knew it as just the Ritzy. Never exactly throbbing with activity, but Roddie used it as his base of operations. Plus, somewhere like the Ritzy had to be a good way of laundering cash.....Or so she'd heard.

"We're expected, Michael." Said Leilani.

"Yeah, fine."

They were allowed through the door, which gave access to the back stairs. No lift....If you weren't fit enough to use the stairs, Roddie obviously didn't want to see you. Had Michael given her less of a smile than usual? Easy to be paranoid around Roddie, but as far as she knew.....There had been a few beatings at the Ritzy, but no one had ever been killed there. Roddie always kept his killings private and off the premises and unlike the Krays....He rarely did the deed himself.

"Oh, these stairs." Muttered Mira.

Leilani grabbed her daughter's arm.

"I'll do a deal.....No being cheeky to Roddie and I'll take you to McDonalds for lunch."

"Really?"

Her daughter had a thing about the fast food burger chain. The huge smile on her face reminded her about Mira's McDonalds addiction, and that her daughter was only fifteen. She might have heaps of teen cool and street cred, but she was still a kid.

"Yes, really.....Anything you like." Said Leilani. "Just be quiet and let me do the talking."

They had to cross a large room at the top of the stairs. Roddie had his office on the other side of the room and several of his guys were always there. They even had comfortable chairs and the kind of vending machines usually only seen in large offices, or hospital waiting rooms. There was even a huge flat screen TV hanging on the wall. Lots of festive things too, Roddie was obviously really into Christmas. Had he always been? Leilani couldn't remember. Two large artificial trees and lights everywhere; dangled over various bits of furniture. It wasn't well organised seasonal decorating, but it looked pretty.

"Love the lights guys." Said Leilani.

No one said a word, though they all looked up as she and Mira crossed the room. The door to Roddie's office was ajar. Michael must have called up to say they were on the way.

"Unlimited Big Macs over Christmas." Muttered Leilani. "Just no winding him up."

"I will be good.....I promise."

Leilani remembered being a teen; all those hormones going wild. It felt like entering Roddie's office with a live grenade walking next to her; one with the pin already half pulled. If only daughters came with a mute button.

"Ahhhh, pleased you came to see me." Said Roddie. "So much nicer than having to send Harris to bring you here. Come in.....Sit down."

Roddie was waving at two chairs in front of his desk. It seemed Harris, yes that was his first name, was going to sit in a chair to the right of his boss. Leilani knew for a fact that Harris had sent at least twelve people to meet their maker and that two of them had been women.

"Best to get it sorted out." Said Leilani, as she sat down.

The promise of unlimited fast food seemed to be working. Mira sat next to her, without saying anything. She hadn't even made eye contact with either of the men.

"Not a misunderstanding, Mira did talk to the fuzz.....The boys in blue." Said Roddie.

"I never did it.....Whatever they say I did." Said Mira.

Roddie just waved a dismissive hand at her daughter. Half the cops in Glasgow were on his payroll. He'd know if Mira had grassed him up and he'd know it for certain. There were ways of dealing with it though and most of them wouldn't include a funeral afterwards.

"We're here to listen, Roddie." Said Leilani. "How can we make this right?"

"Options and alternatives, I'm always happy to discuss them." Said Roddie. "She cost us a lot, in payments to the right people."

"Very expensive to put right." Added Harris.

"We're not wealthy.....At the moment, we're pretty broke." Said Leilani.

There was the dismissive wave again from Roddie. Leilani was getting a little fed up with that. Roddie was worth millions, maybe billions. A few quid to the right cop wasn't going to mean him cutting back at Christmas.

"Alright.....The first option, which is always the first option." Said Roddie. "Harris will call and arrange a place and time. Mira will turn up.....You may come with her if you wish. There will be a beating. It has to be bad; I have a reputation to protect. Let Mira get away with being a grass and everyone will be at it. She will be walking with a stick for quite a while. A scar too, maybe more than one.....Your daughter will never be quite as pretty as she is now."

"Fuck you, Roddie." Yelled Mira.

Harris was quick, the kind of speed you only get from lots of practise and heaps of experience. A gun was in his hand, probably pulled from a holster under his jacket. A large gun, the size and style of large automatic that shouted for respect and silence, without saying a word. Harris was aiming the gun at Mira's head and he looked ready to use it.

"We're all friends here, Harris." Said Roddie. "I'm sure Mira wants to apologise. Then the gun can go away.....For now."

Her daughter might have had an excess of cool, but it's not every day that someone points a gun at your head. Mira was literally petrified, sat perfectly still and quivering with fear. Leilani pinched the back of her daughter's hand and leant in really close; close enough to hiss in her ear.

"Apologise to Roddie, dear.....You will apologise."

"I'm sorry, Roddie." Said Mira.

The gun was gone, as quickly as it had arrived. Roddie was grinning from ear to ear, obviously pleased that his henchman had scared the crap out a fifteen year old girl.

"Alternatives.....Can we talk about alternatives?" Asked Leilani. "Come on Roddie, we've known one another for a long time now."

"Well, there is the free funeral." Said Roddie.

It was sort of a running joke, though even Harris didn't laugh. Piss off Roddie and fail to turn up for a beating.....You got the free funeral. It was genuine, paid for by Roddie, as a final goodbye to a good friend. That was the official reason for his generosity, but everyone knew what Roddie meant by getting a free funeral.

"Come on, Roddie.....She's just a kid." Said Leilani.

"Exile.....If you'd prefer.....I can announce that you and your daughter have been exiled from Glasgow." Said Roddie. "Go and live in London, or anywhere else you fancy. But.....Come back to Glasgow and it'll be two free funerals. No arguments and I don't give a shit how long I've known you. No one grasses and gets away with it. So, are you going into exile?"

"That's not much of a choice, a beating or leave town." Said Leilani. "Can we have a bit of time to think it over?"

"Can I leave Glasgow and my mum stays here?" Asked Mira.

“There is no negotiation.....If you go into exile, it’s both of you.” Said Roddie. “As we do have a bit of history.....I will give you two days to decided which it’s to be. Just remember to call me, or Harris if I’m not around. No hiding in Glasgow.....That would mean two free funerals.”

Mira was quiet the whole way down the stairs and out into the street. It had to be the longest she’d ever been quiet, since reaching puberty. Her daughter was actually pale, even more pale than she usually looked.

“We can talk it over with Spider and Sarah.” Said Leilani. “They’re both as tough as old boots and Spider actually knows Roddie. I’m sure they’ll be able to sort this out. Cheer up.....I still intend to buy you lunch at McDonalds.”

That got a smile, which was nice; even if it did mean her daughter was addicted to fast food burgers. Mira and most of her friends were trendy vegans. In other words, only vegans if a no one was buying them burgers and fries.

“Do you really think Spider can sort out Roddie ?” Asked Mira.

“Yes, I do.....Spider was in the army for years. He’s fought far tougher people than Roddie Aitken.”

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“I was hoping you’d leave talking to Roddie, until after we’d arrived.” Said Spider.

“Mum wanted to get it sorted out.” Said Mira.

“You having a new baby.....I was hoping to avoid you getting involved.” Said Leilani.

Sarah had been there, bought the T shirt and watched the DVD. The number of times she’d seen someone try to sort out a dangerous situation, only to make it far worse. Sadly, the person being the problem had often been her. Things were different now; she had a baby who relied on her.

“This Harris.....He really waved a gun at Mira ?” Asked Sarah.

“Pointed it straight at my face.” Said Mira. “A huge gun.....Would have blown my head off.”

“I know Roddie Aitken; he loves his options and alternatives.” Said Spider. “He might be half crazy, but he’ll have given you a few ideas of what he intended. How did you leave things with him ?”

Leilani looked at her daughter and Mira actually began to tremble. Sarah had arrived in Glasgow thinking it was just a family problem for Spider to sort out. Now though.....She was determined no one was going to hurt a fifteen year old; not while she was around.

“Roddie offered me a really bad beating.” Said Mira. “Or, mum and I could be exiled from Glasgow....”

“Or, he’d give us two free funerals.” Added Leilani.

“Crap.....Sounds like it could have gone better.” Said Spider.

“He thinks I informed on him, to the police.” Said Mira.

“Did you ? Be honest, the truth has a habit of turning up at the worst times.” Said Sarah.

“No.....Never.” Said Mira.

“I believe her.” Said Leilani.

They’d booked into the hotel, but Sarah wanted to use the nanny services as a last resort. No new mother likes to be parted from their child. There was Baby George, asleep in his carry cot. Sarah hadn’t wanted trouble in Glasgow, but Spider needed to help his family. She nodded at Spider and silently mouthed ‘Sophie’ at him.

“Roddie gave us two days to decide.....He probably expects us to choose exile.” Said Leilani.

“Roddie owes me a few favours.” Said Spider. “I’m sure I’ll get him to agree to a few more days. With Harris waving a gun around, it’s time to call for reinforcements. We have a friend called Sophie. Very small is Sophie, but fierce.....Very fierce.”

“I think we need someone fierce.” Said Mira.

“So do I.....Can I use your room to make the call, Mira ?” Asked Sarah.

“Yes, of course.....Ignore the mess.”

Sophie was the person to call if you expected a situation to turn nasty and possibly, very violent. It was strange to be calling Ruby about sending Sophie, while surrounded by so many seasonal decorations and lights. Christmas was obviously important to Leilani and Mira. There were two small artificial trees on Mira’s dressing table and several sets of coloured lights, had been dangled around the room. The floor looked like a dumping ground for grubby teen clothing. Sarah moved closer to the window, where there was a clear space to walk on.

“Christmas everywhere.” Muttered Sarah. “Preparing for war amid the tinsel and lights.....It’s beginning to feel weird.”

The whole of Glasgow seemed to be conspiring in a vibe of peace and love, or at least everyone being nice to one another for a few days. Every window Sarah could see from Mira’s bedroom window, seemed to have something festive to add to the general vibe. One house actually had two dancing Santas in an upstairs window. Fake snow too, there was a lot of spray on snow out there in Glasgow.

“Please pick up the phone, Ruby.” She mumbled.

They had a history, from when they’d both attended the same college. Sarah called Ruby a ridiculous number of times. Always an even number for some reason, her record was twenty two calls in under an hour. For her part, Ruby ignored the calls for a while, but always got back to her. Sarah liked to think of those times as her not quite crazy period. Ruby probably had stronger ideas about all those calls. Ruby picked up at the third ring.

“Hi Sarah, how’s Glasgow ?”

“Very festive.....We need a little fierce helper.” Said Sarah. “Any chance of getting her on the first flight out from; wherever she is ?”

“Yes, I was expecting your call.” Said Ruby. “She’s not on her own now of course, there’s Caleb and they had plans for Christmas. Just telling you, so you know Sophie will be cancelling her plans to help you.”

“That is appreciated.....We both think the world of Sophie.” Said Sarah. “Will Caleb be coming with her ?”

“No, she likes to keep him out of harm’s way.” Said Ruby. “Let me think.....If I pull a few strings and borrow the Polandrous Foundation private jet; Sophie should be with you in the morning.”

“That is good news.....Spider knows him, but this Roddie guy sounds like a psycho.”

“I’ll tell Sophie to pack her rocket launcher.” Said Ruby.

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Mira had offered to go with them to see Roddie. Spider had thought it over, but her presence would only serve to muddy the water. She’d say something, bound to. Then Roddie would get annoyed and before it could be controlled, there’d be a fight. Spider had nothing against violence, at least not as long as he was dishing it out. Being on the wrong end of the huge gun Harris carried under his jacket....That had to be avoided. Spider was sat in front of a happy looking Roddie and a less happy looking Harris. Sarah was looking around, as if trying to memorise the position of every object in Roddie’s office. Spider was in the middle of an old story, about the day he’d saved the life of Roddie Aitken. Roddie had been nothing but a promising new kid on the block in those days.....

“.....When that Russian mob guy grabbed you.....What was his name ?” Asked Spider.

“Ivan, half of them were called Ivan in those days.” Said Roddie.

“Still are.” Added Harris.

“He had you.....Admit it; you were headed for the next life.” Said Spider. “I was carrying my much loved Browning 9mm with me. Superb weapon.....I got him, even from a distance. He was gone, nothing but a heap on the carpet, with a bullet in his head. You though.....Roddie lived to fight another day.”

“No argument from me, I owe you my life.” Said Roddie. “I do remember times though, when I pulled you out of the shit.”

“Good gun the Browning.” Said Harris. “Can jam though.....Notorious for it.”

“Spider’s jammed up.....Twice.” Said Sarah. “He now carries a Glock.”

“Only when I might need it.....But I still miss the Browning.” Said Spider.

There was a natural gap in the conversation and Roddie topped up their glasses with a particularly nice single malt.

“Look, Spider.....If I could, I’d forget all about Mira being a grass.” Said Roddie.

“She denies it.” Said Sarah.

“Well.....She would; wouldn’t she.” Said Harris.

“I have contacts in the police, reliable contacts.” Said Roddie. “I pay them enough to be honest with me and even give me copies of internal documents. I’ve seen a transcript of Mira’s interview under caution. She gave them names and caused me a lot of problems. No matter what she told you and her mother, she’s an informer.”

“She created a lot of expensive problems.” Added Harris.

“A lot of the fuzz had to be paid off.....She’s a grass, Spider.” Said Roddie. “I can’t allow her to get away with that, even if you are related to the girl. Look.....I’ll give her another couple of days. Then Mira has to be gone; out of Glasgow forever. Leilani can stay though and she’ll get no trouble from me.”

“A mother is never likely to abandon her daughter.” Said Sarah.

“You might be surprised.....I’ve known it to happen.” Said Roddie. “Put the idea to her and let Leilani decide if she says yes, or no.”

“I will, but if mother and daughter decide to remain in Glasgow.” Said Spider. “You and I are going to have a problem. I can’t let you hurt either of them.”

“Let’s leave that bridge until we come to it.” Said Roddie.

Harris worried Spider, he had the look. Some said Spider had the same look and maybe he did. Not so much granite eyed, but more cold and simply indifferent. Harris could probably have a friendly drink with you one minute; and empty a clip into you the next. Roddie was tough, but if it came to it.....Spider would try to take out Harris first.

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Sophie was glad that George Polandrous had decided to invest in a private jet. Not that George had ever been against conspicuous wealth, until an appearance on a late night chat show. He’d been called one of the unacceptable faces of capitalism. There had been a lot of bad feeling about hedge funds at the time and George had arrived on TV, just in time to be the public’s whipping boy. That had been then though and the public no longer yelled at him in the street. After semi-retiring, George had said goodbye to ‘delays at terminal two,’ and bought a very nice private jet. Mainly for his regular journeys from London to Paris and back again. Sophie was using it to get from Paris to Glasgow.....

“Oh, I could get used to travelling like this.” Muttered Sophie.

No endless instructions via annoying speakers, the pilot actually came out to tell her they were about fifteen minutes away from landing at Glasgow. Sophie could walk when she wanted to,

without being told to sit down and buckle up. There were seemingly endless amounts of nice food and drink. She was looking longingly at an empty bottle of Bollinger.

"I could open another bottle.....If you like ?" Asked the stewardess.

Yes, there really was a woman dressed in uniform, who seemed to be there, purely to keep her supplied with champagne and chocolate truffles. She looked about the same age as Sophie. Not Sophie's real age of course, she had been born in Moscow, around eighteen eighty seven. The blonde stewardess looked to be in her mid-twenties.

"Oh, I'd love to say yes." Said Sophie. "Sadly.....I have work to do in Glasgow."

Sophie had no idea where she'd be landing. In the USA small jets used the same airports as huge passenger aircraft. The UK had never liked the sound of that idea. She'd be landing at a small airfield in the Glasgow area. George had assured her that Spider knew where to meet her.

"What line of work are you in ?" Asked the stewardess.

George would have said she was his niece, it was a nice simple lie and he'd been using it for years. What was his story about how she put food on the table ? Yes.....She remembered and it wasn't that far from the truth.

"I'm part owner of a hotel in Paris." Said Sophie. "I'm here for the usual rather boring business meeting. I'll be happy when it's all done by email and conference calls."

"Oh dear.....No planes hurtling about and I'd be out of a job." Said the stewardess.

It was a little misty as the plane landed. The crew of the plane made sure she had all her bags and was comfortable in what doubled as the arrivals lounge and general waiting area. The concrete building wasn't pretty, but it was functional. It definitely beat an eight hour wait at Heathrow. There was a vending machine with lots of different choc bars. Sophie was happy; sweets were her weakness, especially choc bars. Caleb was her other weakness, but he was still in Paris. Spider found her nibbling at a bag of chocolates, with lots of packets on her lap.

"Any of those going spare ?" Asked Spider. "Sarah has me on a constant diet."

He usually greeted her with saying she'd grown, which hadn't been funny after the dozenth time of saying.

"Have these.....Every choc tastes of oranges." Said Sophie.

"Yeah.....Great."

Sophie put her precious sweets in her bag and did what she'd done since deciding that Spider, perhaps, wasn't a jerk after all. Spider was in his 40s now and built like a brick outhouse. Sophie would look perpetually about twenty five and she was small.....Tiny but fierce as Spider called her. Barely five foot two, but she could bench press ten times Spider's eight, maybe twenty times his weight. She hugged him, which must have made an amusing image for the others waiting to be picked up.

"Hey, I think you've grown." Said Spider.

"Stop that, or I will hurt you."

Spider leant down a little, to whisper.

"Have you come equipped ?"

"Private jet.....Internal flight, with no baggage checks." She replied. "Of course I have. In the large denim coloured bag."

Spider could just about lift the bag, but she could tell he wouldn't be able to carry it far. Soft living of course and having a new baby. Those kinds of things weakened a man, but Sophie wasn't going to say it.....Unless Spider made another comment about her size.

"No rocket launcher ?" Asked Spider.

“Ruby told me not to bring it.”

~ ~

Sarah had thought Sophie wouldn't want to see Leilani and her daughter. Often Sophie had operated in the background, watching the potential bad guys, without being seen. It wasn't the only way to do it and as Sophie had told her....

“If I can walk naked and unseen, right through the economy section on an Airbus; I can manage to avoid Roddie and his gang seeing me.”

There were times in the past when Sophie had concerned Sarah, but since being with Caleb, she'd been far less wild. No more enticing strangers into aircraft toilets for casual sex. Not that Sarah could preach....Her own secret sin had been men who'd worked behind the counter in Asian takeaway food places. She'd had a real thing about guys with an Indian accent. That was all before she'd become intimate with Rupert Bailey. Intimate.....Even the word gave her a warm glow.

Sarah had left Baby George with the nanny service, while she and Spider introduced Sophie to Mira and Leilani, at their house. After Roddie's offer of exile or free funerals, there was a definite feeling of being under siege, in Leilani's home.

“I have a hotel room, but I'd like to stay here every night.” Said Sophie. “You can say no, but you'll never know I'm here. If Roddie sends Harris after you both, I guarantee it'll be at night.”

“Yes, of course.....The sofa makes a good bed.” Said Leilani.

“I've slept on it a few times.” Said Mira.

“I won't sleep; not at all.....I can go for weeks without much sleep.” Said Sophie. “I'll grab an hour or two during the day.”

Sarah hadn't been able to lift Sophie's denim coloured bag, but Sophie swung it about as though it weighed nothing. Sophie had carried it into Leilani's house, mentioning that its contents might be needed if the kakka hit the air mover.

“I must admit.....I'll feel safer with someone watching while we sleep.” Said Mira.

“Is that why you need whatever is in the bag?” Asked Leilani.

“This is my 'what if' bag.” Said Sophie. “What if the guy over the road really is a serial killer....What if the drug cartel does resent you operating in that street.....What if Roddie lied about a few days and sends Harris tonight. You get the idea. There must be no talk about my bag to anyone; not even your best friends.”

“I think you guys are our best friends.” Said Mira. “I won't tell a soul.”

Sarah gasped as Sophie pulled the zip right across and opened the bag. In the early days, Ruby's friends and the wunderkinds hadn't had that much in the way of modern weapons. Sarah had used an old revolver, that looked like it was a prop in a seventies cop show. Spider loved his old Browning, but it had been known to jam. None of them were armed with anything you could describe as the bleeding edge of technology. They'd done alright though, most of them had survived and many of their enemies.....Hadn't. The contents of the bag screamed special ops and had probably cost a fortune. Spider reached towards an impressive looking assault rifle.

“Wow, Sophie.....You brought a lot of firepower.” Said Spider.

Sophie caught Spider's hand and pushed it away.

“Not without gloves on Spider.” Said Sophie. “The only fingerprints on these weapons will be mine and.....I can do some weird things with my fingerprints.”

“Must be a new trick.....I don't remember that one.” Said Sarah.

“Yes.....I've recently learned a lot of new tricks.”

The question from Mira was inevitable, given the circumstances. It still made Sarah sad that things had reached such a terrible state.

“Can I have one of your guns, Sophie ?” Asked Mira. “I can then protect my mum.”

“I’ll protect your mum.....I don’t want you anywhere near a gun.” Said Sophie.

“Neither do I.” Said Leilani.

“It’s all my fault.” Said Mira. “I did it.....I did inform on Roddie. I have no idea why, they never gave me any money. Just a promise of letting me off if I get arrested for something minor in the future. I bet that was a lie.”

“I think everyone already knew you’d done it.” Said Spider. “Roddie has lots of the fuzz on his payroll and they were all pointing at you.”

“Maybe leaving Glasgow is a sensible idea.” Said Leilani.

“We have space in London.” Said Sarah. “Spider kept the place he was renting, so we have a lot of spare space. If you decided to leave Glasgow, we can give you a safe place to stay in London.”

“Yes.....My old place in Ealing.” Said Spider. “I loved living there for many years.”

Sarah had no idea why she’d made the offer. She had a new baby and there was still her business requiring a lot of her time. And it had to be admitted, Mira might well have problems capable of following her to Ealing. There was something about the girl though, she looked trapped. Sarah knew how that felt, she’d once felt the same way about her own life.

“Thank you, it might make the decision easier.” Said Leilani. “For now though.....I’ll need to think about it.”

“During the day I’ll watch Roddie.” Said Sophie. “Just to make sure there are no unexpected surprises heading our way.”

~ ~

Sophie could put out what she called her ‘don’t you worry about me,’ field. A mental ability she could use, without fully understanding. It effectively gave her the ability to be invisible to the vast majority of people. Their eyes saw her, but their brain didn’t acknowledge her presence. It was how she’d walked the full length of a passenger plane, naked; without being in a huge amount of trouble. The other wunderkinds could see her and for some reason, a tiny number of normal humans could see her, but the number really was very tiny. Small enough to be an acceptable risk.....

“Ahhhh.....Another new face.” Sophie muttered. “Roddie has been busy for this close to Christmas day.”

The Ritzy had been throbbing, considering it was the lunch time trade. Not that Sophie was interested in the ordinary punters off the street. She’d found a slight shadow at the corner of the street outside Roddie’s base of operations. Using her mental abilities and the shadow, she became totally invisible, to everyone. Anyone given access to the stairs leading up to Roddie’s office, was photographed on her phone. The pictures then went to a tech guy who Ruby had on retainer. He had access to various police databases. Legal access ? Maybe not, but sometimes expediency trumps the law of the land. Ruby’s guy sent Sophie names to go with the faces.

“I thought you didn’t look like part of the crowd.” Muttered Sophie.

There was a small bio on her phone for the man, who had several visible scars on his face. Middle aged, with hair that was almost pure white. The man had a military look to him, but it was his profession which caused Sophie to call Spider.

“Professional assassin, I think they’re called triggermen these days.” Said Sophie. “He’s known as.....You’ll love this, Spider; Lucky Billy Wilson.”

“Oh shit, I know Billy, though not that well.” Said Spider. “A ruthless killer with a huge list of suspected kills. Lots of scars on him that can be seen, with lots more hidden by his clothing. An old timer.....A bit of a dinosaur really.”

“I’d try to get into his head, though I’m not as good as picking up thoughts as Ruby. He came out again pretty quickly and got in a cab.....I have no idea where he is now. How dangerous is he, Spider?”

“As I said, I’m no expert on Lucky Billy.” Said Spider. “He got his name by surviving a lot of wounds. Mostly bullets, but someone once used a machete on him. He does seem to have luck, but he’s also a bit of a nutter. He won’t think twice about slicing up a fifteen year old girl. He’s also a native of Glasgow, so he’ll have places to hide in the city.”

“I think we should tell Leilani and Mira to get on a plane to London.” Said Sophie.

“Yeah.....I think you’re right.”

They were both assuming Billy was there to kill Mira, but it seemed a pretty safe assumption. Roddie had recently threatened Mira and her mother, with two free funerals.

~ ~

Sophie had told Spider that Roddie was up to something. Nothing concrete, but when she’d walked past him as he’d been buying coffee.....There had been a feeling. As far as Spider was concerned, Sophie having a feeling was proof enough. Roddie would be up to something.

“It doesn’t make sense, Roddie got what he wanted.” Said Spider. “I called him as soon as Leilani agreed. Sarah and I are driving them to the airport. Roddie has won; they’re both going into exile.”

“Does he just want you to think that was what he wanted?” Asked Sarah.

Sophie was still doing her reconnaissance thing, watching Roddie and everyone shifty who entered the restricted area of the Ritzy. Ideally she needed at least two helpers, but there was no one else. Sophie was always on the phone though and very good at sending texts. He and Sarah were at Leilani’s house, with a fairly grumpy looking Mira.

“We had this under control, mum and me.” Said Mira. “Then the experts arrived from London....Now there’s a psycho hitman out to get us. You’ve made things worse, Spider...Much worse.”

“Don’t talk to your uncle like that.....Show some respect.” Yelled Leilani.

“We did abandon our Christmas at home to help you.” Said Sarah.

“Sorry.” Muttered Mira.

The problem was, Mira was right; they had effectively, made things worse. Sarah had realised it, though he didn’t want to discuss it in front of Leilani and her daughter. They might pack a few things and run away, to parts unknown. That would definitely make things much worse. Roddie hadn’t wanted them in comfortable exile in London, he’d wanted them dead. Offering a deal was just to draw Leilani and Mira out into the open, so that Lucky Billy Wilson could kill them in a particularly gruesome way. Roddie would make them an example to any other would-be police informers.

“Ok.....I think the plan to get you on a plane to London, is fine.” Said Spider. “We just need to make things a bit more stealthy. No using our car to drive you to the airport, Roddie will probably have pictures of it on his wall by now. I take it not everything in Glasgow is Uber these days.”

“No, there are minicab places.” Said Leilani.

“Good.....No booking in advance.” Said Spider. “Leave plenty of time to get to the airport and call a local cab company when you’re ready to leave.”

“We’ll get Sophie to follow you all the way to the airport.” Said Sarah. “Sophie is better than special-ops soldiers.....She’ll keep you safe.”

There were risks, Roddie was certain to have someone at the airport, with access to bookings data. Spider didn't want to give Leilani too many negatives to worry about though, there were already too many of those. Once they were in the departure lounge, they'd be safe.

"I know the woman three doors along." Said Leilani. "Kirsty is fairly new to the area; I guarantee she doesn't know Roddie. I can ask her to book our airport cab from her house.....To be extra stealthy."

"That.....Sounds a great idea." Said Spider.

~ ~

It might have been a good idea, a really good idea, as part of a damned fine plan. There are always problems though, especially when dealing with airlines and transportation in general. Lots of things to go wrong, from the weather, to delays because of mechanical problems. Then there are people of course, who create most of the problems in every plan. For one thing, Mira decided to be far too stealthy for her own good.....

"I really think.....We shouldn't go to the airport this late." Said Sophie. "The dark and less traffic on the roads.....Plus Lucky Billy will love hunting you in the dark."

"But.....We have the tickets." Said Leilani.

She had the sound of desperation in her voice. The usually sound everyone gets from long delays to actually getting on an aircraft. Leilani also sounded scared.

"Tickets can be replaced, you can't." Said Sophie. "I'll gladly pay for new tickets, if you agree not to travel tonight."

"I called Salim at the cab place." Said Mira. "A cab is on its way here.....Right now."

So much for being picked up at Kirsty's, the new neighbour. If Roddie had the cab company on a retainer for information.....Lucky Billy might be outside, waiting for them.

"There's time.....I'll call Spider." Said Leilani. "If he says we cancel tonight, I'll pay off the cab and we'll try again another day."

They all heard it, the noise that meant her call wasn't connecting with Spider's phone, or the service was down in that part of Glasgow. Mobile phones, the internet and lots of other essential tech services, seemed far too prone to simply stopping; for no apparent reason. Caleb had a friend who blamed it all on the Russian's, but he was Caleb's crazy friend, who had once eaten a live cockroach for a bet.

"Fuck.....I'll try on my phone." Said Sophie.

Spider and Sarah had to spend some time at the hotel; Baby George needed the company of his parents. They'd be either at the hotel, or on their way to Leilani's house. Sophie shouted fuck again, as her phone refused to connect with the network Spider used.

"A landline.....I know you have a BT line." Said Sophie. "I'll try their hotel on the landline."

"No time.....We have to leave now." Said Mira.

"She's right.....I'm scared, Sophie." Said Leilani. "We're leaving now and going to the airport."

Sophie could feel it, the tension from so many crucial things going wrong. All of it coincidences of course, but she was beginning to understand why people had once believed in evil spirits and the dark curses of wicked witches. Sophie had a few special gifts and rendering Leilani and her daughter unconscious, wasn't that hard to do. Against their will though ! For better or worse, she decided to protect them, but let them go to the airport if they wished to. Even opening the front door felt like letting dark shadows into the house.

"Good, it's really dark tonight." Said Mira. "I like the dark.....We can hide in the dark."

Sophie might have agreed, the dark was good to hide in. The problem was that Lucky Billy was a highly skilled assassin with a long list of successful kills. The dark was likely to work better for him, than it would for them.

"There.....I can see a cab turning into the street." Said Leilani.

A large vehicle, Mira must have mentioned they had a few bags to go with them. The sort of cab Sophie had seen abroad, more than in Britain. Sliding doors and painted sides, advertising a few local businesses. As it pulled up under a streetlight, Sophie could see the driver leaning out of the window. A man with dark skin and a melodic accent, that hinted at somewhere in the Indian subcontinent.

"Leilani and Mira for the airport ?" He asked.

"That's us." Shouted Mira.

Stronger than he looked, the driver helped them load up his cab with their bags. Sophie watched and waited for gunshots out of the darkness, which mercifully never came. It was a busy area of Glasgow, Sophie sensed quite a few people walking nearby. If she'd had time to get to know Roddie and Lucky Billy.....But anyone out there could be them, or another member of Roddie's gang. The anger of a street fight was easy to pick up, but Lucky Billy was probably a psychopath. There'd be no emotions to sense, none at all.

"Hurry up.....We need to get off the street." Sophie whispered to Leilani.

"No messing about, Mira.....Get yourself inside the cab." Said Leilani.

"I wasn't messing about."

There was tension and even the cab driver began looking around. It was a relief when everyone was inside the cab, with the sliding doors closed and the radio playing softly. Christmas songs of course, Smooth Scotland was currently playing Slade's 'Merry Xmas Everybody.'

"Any particular route to the airport ?" Asked the driver. "Are we picking anyone else up ?"

"No.....Just get us to the airport quickly." Said Leilani.

"Quick as you can." Added Mira.

"I'll go out along the M8.....The quickest way at night." Said the driver. "Visiting relatives are you ?"

"Something like that." Said Sophie.

More tension, not that Sophie blamed the cab driver. A run to the airport had to be rare from that part of Glasgow, which meant it was a large fare. Otherwise he must have been tempted to refuse to take them anywhere. Sophie knew they looked and sounded strange, but the cab driver still seemed quite friendly, when he wasn't looking over his shoulder.

"Did you see the match last night ?" Asked the driver.

"I hate football." Said Mira.

"It was the darts championship final." Said the driver.

Finally, Sophie felt the hate and rage that enabled her to spot the car Roddie was in. A large Mercedes with a driver and a man sat next to him in the passenger seat. Probably Harris in the seat next to the driver. In the back was Roddie Aitken, with Lucky Billy Wilson sat next to him. Assuming at least three of the men in the car intended to open fire on the cab; the odds weren't good for Sophie's two scared looking ladies. Cold outside, Glasgow in December could dip well below freezing. That didn't stop Sophie from lowering the closest window.

"Get down on the floor.....Do it now, quickly." Yelled Sophie.

"What's wrong ?" Asked Leilani.

"Get.....On the floor !" Shouted Sophie.

As Sophie leant out of the window with a Glock 34 in her right hand, someone from the Mercedes began firing. There wasn't that much traffic on the M8, but what there was, reacted to the gunshots as Sophie fired back at the Mercedes. The driver was her target. A car without a driver, while doing motorway speeds.....With luck everyone in the Merc might die. So might some innocent people in cars on the motorway, but Sophie hadn't chosen the place for the inevitable battle.

"No.....Keep driving straight." Yelled Sophie.

Damn, it looked like Lucky Billy really was as good as his reputation. The driver of the minicab was either dead or dying, blood rushing out of a bullet hole in his neck. Their cab was rushing towards a crash barrier, at an alarming speed.

"Fuck it.....Ruby will moan, but better than them dying." Muttered Sophie.

The Glock was a hand me down from Ruby, with a customised grip. The weapon was perfect for Sophie and it held twenty four rounds. She could keep firing at the Merc, without worrying about running out of ammunition. At least not for a while.

"The driver.....I think he'd dead." Said Leilani.

Sophie had never been into fire as one of her gifts, but she had used it in the past. She'd once incinerated a car in Budapest, to save the life of Olga. That had been a long time ago and now felt like the memory of a stranger. Sophie mentally clicked on a part of her mind she rarely used and the large Mercedes was instantly engulfed in red hot flames.

"Shit.....Did you do that ?" Asked Mira.

There was Mira, wide eyed and looking through the open window. The Merc flipped and rolled, side over side, until it collided with white courier van. Their cab hit the crash barrier about then and Sophie was knocked out. A rare thing, but occasionally; even her wunderkind body, couldn't cope with what was happening to it.

~ ~

Spider was tough and had a look about him, which usually deterred anyone from trying to give him trouble. As one of his teachers at school had once told him; there were smaller kids to bully, who didn't look so scary. A good job really, as he was an ordinary human, with no special gifts. Sarah too, was a tough, but fairly fragile human. No being miraculously healed for either of them, if they ended up at the wrong end of an assault rifle. Ruby had once returned from the dead, maybe twice. That was too spooky and weird, to be a subject for general wunderkind gossip. Spider speeded up and actually fired his gun while trying to steer past a delivery van, while accelerating from eighty miles per hour.

"Shit.....I knew it. That's Roddie's car." Shouted Sarah. "How did we miss him ?"

"Lots of back roads come out onto the M8." Said Spider. "I'm a local and even I didn't see this attack coming."

Spider had a Glock 34 too; Sophie seemed to have a supplier somewhere. It had crossed Spider's mind, that one of their contacts in British intelligence, might be supplying Sophie with guns and ammunition. He fired several times at the Mercedes, where someone was firing at a cab. To Spider it was 'the cab,' the one booked by Mari to get them to the airport. The cab began to slew about, the usual sign that someone had taken out the driver.

"Oh.....This isn't going to end well." Said Sarah.

Their marriage was so new and shiny, that Spider liked to think of Sarah as his wife. He even talked about her as his wife. His wife had a gun, another Glock that held twenty four rounds. She was the wrong side of their car to use it on the Merc.

"I'll climb over and shoot from the back." Said Sarah.

"No.....Not at this speed." Yelled Spider. "You can stay right where you are."

Sarah was a law unto herself, even Ruby rarely managed to get her to obey orders. Spider knew that his wife....There it was again. His wife was likely to soon be clambering over onto the rear seat. There was a distraction though, as the Mercedes appeared to burst into flames.

"Wow.....Did you do that ?" Asked Sarah.

"Hey, I'm just an ordinary guy with an ordinary gun." Said Spider. "My guess is that Sophie decided to use her whammy on them."

Stopping the car and getting out felt weird on a motorway, but all the other traffic had stopped too. A few cars had kids in, who were pointing at the burning Merc. It all felt strangely surreal, as Spider held onto his gun and approached the still burning car.

"Surely no one could have survived that." Said Sarah.

"Never assume." Said Spider.

Another car with kids in, who seemed to be treating the action as some kind of entertainment. One car started to edge between the jammed up vehicles. The Merc had a minor explosion under the bonnet and the car stopped trying to escape the jam.

"They'll all have phones with cameras." Said Spider. "Tomorrow we'll be on every breakfast news broadcast."

"Foxy will fix it for us, he always does." Said Sarah.

There were rumours Foxy had died, but Spider didn't want to remind Sarah about it. Sir Edwin Fox ran, or might still run a kind of moderation service for British security. All those departments starting with an M, with thousands of spies watching everyone; even the other departments starting with an M. Someone clever had realised there'd eventually be chaos, as each department viewed the others as a potential threat. Foxy's job had been to maintain order and stop the chaos. According to the unconfirmed rumours, a long running heart disease mixed with type two diabetes, had finished off Sir Edwin. Even if it was true, there'd be a new guy in the job, or maybe a new gal. Either way, there'd be someone to make a call to the police and use a get out of jail free card.

"Watch out, one of them is still alive." Said Sarah.

Leaning against the side of the burning Merc, Spider had assumed the still smouldering body was out of the action, forever. As he stood up, Spider recognised Lucky Billy Wilson from the pictures Sophie had taken of him outside the Ritzy. Barely recognisable and limping, but it looked like Billy's famous luck was holding. Or was it ? All those burns had to be agony. As Billy lifted his gun, Spider fired twice. Both shots to the head, just in case Billy had come out that night while wearing Kevlar.

"How was he still moving ? You definitely did him a favour." Said Sarah.

Spider leant into the Merc, through the now shattered windscreen.

"The driver and his friend Harris, are definitely dead." Said Spider.

Bits of them had been pureed at some point, probably when the car had tumbled side over side. Massive physical damage and then the fire had finished the job. Spider had expected Roddie to do a bit of a Houdini, to leap at him out of the wreckage.

"Damn.....I can hear sirens." Said Sarah. "We need to get done, what needs to be done."

"No hurry." Said Spider. "Tell them the phrase Foxy gave us and give the cops the telephone number. Even if Foxy is dead, his people will know about us."

"Foxy is dead ?" Asked Sarah. "You never told me."

"Sorry.....It was only a rumour. He might still be alright."

There was Roddie Aitken, or at least what was left of him. Inside the Merc and sort of mixed up in what was left of the rear seat. A kind of human-leather seat mixtures and Roddie was definitely

dead. No last minute coming back to life, like in a movie. Roddie was the real kind of dead, the permanent kind.

“Forgive me.....I need to be totally sure.” Said Spider.

Spider fired his gun six times, three to the head and three to where Roddie’s heart ought to be. Spider didn’t think of it as being needlessly brutal, he just needed to be sure Roddie wasn’t going to hurt anyone else, ever. Sarah nodded at him, as they made eye contact.

“Sirens getting closer.....We need to help Sophie and your sister.” Said Sarah.

“I told you, we’re not running.” Said Spider. “We’re owed a few favours for what we’ve helped Foxy with in the past.”

“What if he’s dead ?” Asked Sarah.

“Then long live the new Foxy. Someone has to be sat at that desk of his.”

There was a paramedic vehicle next to the cab, though it must have had a hard time getting along the jammed up M8. No need to terrify a busy medical professional, Spider put away his gun, as did Sarah. The paramedic was a bit of a shock, a man in a Santa costume, complete with a beard and the obligatory red hat. Probably on his way to a Christmas function of some kind, when he was diverted to mayhem on the motorway. Spider leant through the sliding doors of the cab. The driver hadn’t gone through the windscreen; he’d been crushed up against it. The thing that had killed him though, was a gunshot wound in the side of his neck. The three women were lying on the floor of the cab.

“How are they ?” Asked Spider.

“Are you a relative ?” Asked the medic.

“Her.....She’s my sister.” Said Spider, while pointing.

“She has what appears to be a mild concussion and should be fine.” Said the medic. “The woman called Sophie; according to her necklace.....She should be fine too. The worry is the young girl.”

“Why, what’s wrong ?” Asked Sarah.

“Her neck was twisted when the cab hit the crash barrier.” Said the medic. “I don’t like the look of it and her pupil response is.....It’s not as it should be.”

“Please help her, she’s only fifteen.” Said Spider. “Poor Mira has gone through a hell of a lot and little of it was her fault.”

Close up now and Spider could see the paramedic’s Santa wig and beard. They really looked authentic; he couldn’t see where the fake hair had been glued to the guy’s face. Normally he was shameless about satisfying his curiosity and would have asked, but given the condition of poor Mira.....

“I give you my word.....I will do the best I can for her.” Said the medic.

~ ~

Sarah looked out of the ward window and it was snowing. A lot of snow for London, but according to the nurses, not that much for Glasgow. Sophie, Leilani and Mira were all in a small ward on their own. That had required a few calls from Foxy’s office to arrange. As for Foxy ? It seemed the rumours of his death were true. A bad heart, diabetes and general work related stress, had put him in an early grave. But as Spider had commented.

“I think he had a good innings....I just hope we get on with the new lady.”

Her husband could never have been described as overly sentimental. The new Foxy was called Delia and a catch up with her had been promised for some time in January. Delia had arranged for a few Christmas gifts to arrive for Leilani and Mira, so Sarah already liked her. Delia was Ex-Roedean apparently, but no one is perfect.

“If they don’t let me out in the morning, I’ll discharge myself.” Said Sophie.

“Like a giant firework.” Giggled Mira.

“Don’t upset anyone in authority, Sophie.” Said Sarah. “The police accepted whatever Delia’s people said, but only just.....Or at least it seems that way. We do everything we’re told to do.”

The police had even returned Sophie’s bag of guns, her collection of lethality, as she called it. No awkward questions about the four dead bodies in a burned out Mercedes. Local TV news picked up on the dead cabbie, but that was it. It had amazed Sarah, how easily a few calls from British intelligence, had smoothed agitated waters in Glasgow.

“Where is Spider ? He was getting me some choc bars.” Said Sophie.

“I saw him talking to the blonde nurse.” Said Leilani. “I think she’s got a thing about him.”

Mira giggled again, which seemed almost a miracle. Yes, she’d been knocked about in the crash and injured, but there was no life threatening damage to her spine, or her brain. The paramedic must have been mistaken, or something strange had happened. Sophie had caught a glimpse of Santa Paramedic, or Spider and her might have put it all down to trauma induced insanity. The emergency services insisted they had no paramedic in the area, at least not one dressed as Santa Claus.

“He’s here.....Arms full of lovely chocolate.” Said Sophie.

“I want some.....You can’t eat it all.” Said Mira.

Even with Roddie dead, gangs often had long memories. Leilani and Mira were still coming to London when they were well. As per the original plan, they were going to live in Spider’s old place in Ealing.

“No, these chocs are all mine.” Said Sophie.

“You are.....So greedy.” Said Mira.

Sarah had brought Baby George to the hospital. There he was, on a chair, all snuggled up in his carry cot. Sarah fondled her baby’s rather meagre head of hair.

“One day, you’ll be arguing over chocolate.” Sarah muttered.

As for the mysterious Santa Paramedic ? There was so much else happening, that they’d agreed to let the whole thing drift, until they no longer remembered it. But, as Spider often said.....

“Anything can happen at Christmas.”

~ ~

~ The End ~

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Happy Christmas Everyone!!

There has been some reintroducing of characters from the Ruby books, but I didn’t want to overdo it. Has this offering piqued your interest ? If so, there are several Ruby books on my website.