

Ruby 3

Chapter 23 – A New Friend

“Max was pretty good at mixing up chemicals to build what were universally known as Improvised Explosive Devices, or IEDs. In some parts of the world they seemed to learn the required skills before leaving high school.”

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Eugenie was good at reading people, without necessarily delving into their private thoughts. Dana and Giles were an open book for the entire world to read, even if they couldn't see it. Tough professionals who'd decided children weren't for them, though deep down it was the missing part of their lives they both craved. Neither of them had needed more than one of Eugenie's smiles to agree to look after Seong while she was gone. No asking how long she'd be or where she was going.

“I bet they'll be expecting a baby within a year.” She muttered.

Xue had been a tougher nut to crack; he had a lot of loyalty for George and Malou. Eugenie did wonder if her whammy had worked on him, but he was still tinkering about in the garage when she left. No other casual watchers hired by George, she'd have felt their attention if there were. As Eugenie stepped out of the doors of the hotel at just before eight, she was as she'd wanted to be. Alone and unobserved. She'd tried to dress down, to look not just ordinary but a little frumpy too. Her mop of red hair let her down; it always seemed to attract the more vocal types.

“Tu es trop jolie pour être seule ce soir.” Said the young man. ‘You're too pretty to be on your own this evening.’

He had the looks and manner that might tempt her, but there wasn't time for that kind of self-indulgence. A touch of her hand on his arm and a little of her whammy, sent the young man on his way. Eugenie stood on the corner opposite the hotel and waited. A young man with a limp approached her at ten minutes past the hour and she knew he hadn't come to tell her how pretty she was.

“You must be Eugenie ?” He said in faultless English.

“I am.”

“Come with me, my van isn't far away.”

Of course she ignored common sense and followed him, it was why she'd been waiting for him. His limp didn't slow him down much, or put him off pointlessly walking long distances. She knew who they were, the people making barely susceptible signs to Mr Limp, as they walked past. A rub of an eyebrow, a hand rubbing a head, an old lady nodding. They were the ones watching to see if she'd arranged to be followed. It took about forty minutes for them to finally arrive at a grubby Peugeot van, parked about a two minute walk from the hotel. Mr Limp was a gentleman or at least someone had taught him a code of behaviour. He opened the passenger door for her.

“No hood over my head ?” She asked.

“Not as long as you behave yourself.”

Eugenie sat in the passenger seat and tried her best to look a little scared. She even tried to emote harmlessness through her eyes as Mr Limp made eye contact.

“Do I get a name to call you ?” She asked.

"I'm just one of several drivers you'll meet today. If it helps you can call me Fred....In fact you can call us all Fred, even the women."

Cute reply, but he'd already told her everything she wanted to know and much more. Asking for a name invariably triggered the target to think about their own name. On top of that he'd pictured the other people who drove or delivered messages for Villand. For some she only had first names, but their faces were in her mind. Enough information to mortally damage Villand's network if it came to that and if she survived the meeting.

"Can I open the window a little ?" She asked.

"Yes, whatever makes you feel comfortable. You've a good two hours of being driven around to look forward to."

It was easier to see road signs without the grubby window in the way, but of course they'd have planned for that. They drove east to begin with, out towards St Blaise. Then the driver made an insane manoeuvre at a junction and they were heading south. Mr Limp answered his phone and just said yes down it about three times. Eugenie was beginning to respect Villand and his people, they knew what they were doing. She thought they were going to use one of the bridges to cross The River Seine, until Mr Limp pulled up in a side road behind an official looking building.

"This is where I pass you onto another Fred." He said.

Eugenie got out of the van, just as a shiny black Lexus drove towards them. Mr Limp muttered to the driver, who was a woman. Eugenie already knew the woman from delving into his mind. The woman with the huge fringe of dark hair, which nearly covered her eyes, was called Aria. Still polite, Mr Limp opened the passenger door for her and even smiled.

"A little comfort for you this time." He said.

"Hello Fred.....Nice car." Said Eugenie.

They didn't drive off and Eugenie had been expecting it. At least they'd given her to a woman to carry out a thorough search.

"Just relax, it'll be quicker that way." Said Aria.

Aria leant over until she was right on top of her. Clothing first, the usual search for hidden transmitters sewn into garments. After that Aria's fingers were everywhere, even feeling her crotch through her panties. All horrible and pointless, though Eugenie had known it was going to happen before they let her get anywhere close to Villand.

"Fine." Said Aria.

That was it, after leaving her feeling abused and degraded, just fine. At least Aria gave her a carrier bag with some bottled water in it and a few packs of junk food.

"Don't go too crazy on the water, there are no toilet stops."

The Lexus was nice after the bone jarring old van and Aria drove better than Mr Limp. Less sudden braking and switching lanes at the last minute. It probably meant they were sure there was no following team, or if there had been, they'd lost them.

"Ah..... We're going east again Fred.....My least favourite part of Paris."

Aria just smiled and carried on driving roughly in the direction of the 11th arrondissement. Eugenie opened the window without asking, mainly to feel less trapped, less out of control. Aria answered her phone and said yes at least five times, before saying no just once. They turned north and had the usual slow crawl through the busy streets of Paris. Eventually Eugenie saw a sign for the Rue Saint-Maur underground station. Aria briefly pulled up in a busy street close to the station.

"Wait here, your next ride will be long in a minute." Said Aria.

"How will I know them ?"

“They’ll know you.”

That was it, she was left on the pavement watching the Lexus head towards the centre of Paris. Eugenie had the registration memorised and the plate for Mr Limp’s old van. Not that she expected them to be genuine. She had to give it to Villand, his people were damn good. They were watching her of course, leaving her long enough to consider making contact with her own people, or long enough for a tail car to stop to make sure she was alright. After twenty five long minutes stood on her own, a blue saloon car pulled up, a Renault going by the badge on the front. This man wasn’t as polite as Mr Limp, he didn’t even get out of the car.

“Get in Eugenie, I’m the next Fred.” He said.

He was really Adebamgbe, a recent arrival from Nigeria. He was a popular guy, or at least Mr Limp seemed to think he was alright. Adebamgbe’s friends, who seemed to be many, knew him as Ade. Eugenie settled herself in the passenger seat and hoped Ade was her last Fred of the night. It had to be well after ten and it had already been a long day.

“I preferred the Lexus.” She said.

“Not long now..... You’ve been good. No one following you.” Said Ade.

They drove north and then turned west, as though taking her in the direction of the Sacré-Cœur. No weird manoeuvres, no risky driving. Ade knew where they were going and seemed in no hurry about getting her there, or avoiding potential followers. He wasn’t even checking the rear view mirror as often as the other Freds. All that running her around Paris and when Ade pulled up, they were in a side street quite near to the Gare du Nord.

“We’re there.” Said Ade.

Eugenie got out of the car and followed Ade, as he turned into an alleyway between two large buildings. The alley was quite dark in the places where lights in the main road didn’t quite reach. There was a sign for the rear entrance of a second hand store.

“There, this is as far as I go.” Said Ade. “You are expected. I’m to make sure you go inside before leaving.”

“Thank you.”

Ade grabbed her arm and smiled at her.

“You’ll be fine.”

Maybe he was one of the polite males after all, or it might be what he said to everyone. Everyone told they’d be fine, even if they were on the way to their own execution. Eugenie walked up to the door and banged on it with her fist, twice. A gentle tap would have looked weak and any more than two bangs would have look far too aggressive. A young man opened the door, Villand did seem to like his helpers to be young. Easier to influence at that age of course, eager to believe anyone who might offer something better than....Whatever it was they were running away from.

“My name us Eugenie.....I’m expected.”

“I know.”

His face wasn’t known to Mr Limp, they might have some separation of inside and outside people. The young man took her along a corridor and up a set of poorly lit stairs. Another guy with manners, he held the door open for her after knocking.

“Go in, he’s expecting you.”

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Max had only listened to Monique to stop her moaning about it all the time. Anything for a quiet life and listening to her tended to keep her quiet for longer than yelling at her. Plus yelling at her tended to mean her spending the night somewhere else other than his bed. After a while playing the game

of going along with her plans to escape, had become a serious determination to get out of the hole in the ground and back to the real world.

"We'd never have got away with this when Kallina brought all my supplies." He said. "She knew every potential mixture you could put together, out of things bought in a supermarket, to create an explosion. Sometimes she refused to bring me something, just because she had a feeling I might have found a way to misuse it."

"We're lucky Charlotte isn't as bright." Said Monique.

"Oh Charlotte is bright enough, probably far sharper than Kallina. She's just got other things on her mind."

Max was pretty good at mixing up chemicals to build what were universally known as Improvised Explosive Devices, or IEDs. In some parts of the world they seemed to learn the required skills before leaving high school. He wasn't an expert though, especially when it came to the chemistry. Why they needed large quantities of lime scale remover should have been a question Charlotte was asking every time Monique asked for more of it. The bottles turned up though, even the right brand.

"Pour it slowly while I mix everything together." He said.

Three different powdered products and the lime scale remover, all mixed up and left to set for about twelve hours. The result looked like window putty, which Monique's long and delicate fingers worked into the cracks and holes around the two largest existing holes in the wall.

"I'm still worried about shelf life." He said. "The active ingredients will deteriorate over time. The question is how much time. It's not as if we can look it up on the internet."

"Does it really matter that much." She asked.

"It does Monique, trust me. I know of at least three terrorist attacks that failed because the homemade explosives deteriorated with age. Leave it too long and we'll get smoke and a little fire instead of an explosion. Even commercial explosives have a use by date."

"Then we'd better not leave it too long." She said.

She was right of course, he'd set a mental post it note in his head, to make the escape attempt within three months at the latest. He started to help her rub the last batch of paste into the cracks.

"No Max, not with your clumsy great hands, I'll do it."

After a few days the paste dried completely and hardened until it was almost indistinguishable from the rest of the rock wall. Get enough of it in the right place and ignite it with a homemade fuse and.....Boom. If it hadn't gone off of course and if he'd got the proportions right in the mix.

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Ruby had hoped they'd be at the bottom of the tunnel by dawn, finding their way through the caves. The steam had taken longer than anticipated to clear and the heat hadn't dropped as quickly as expected. Rory had suggested wearing protective clothing and beginning the descent, though no one else was that keen on the idea.

"There isn't enough for everyone." Sophie had told him.

"We could send a small advance party." Rory had persisted.

"No, we'll wait." Ruby had said and Ishel had agreed with her.

Protective clothing was uncomfortable to wear, even for a short period of time. Everyone had been relieved by her decision, except Rory. At a few minutes after dawn, the first aircraft had flow over them at no higher than a thousand feet. Every head was lifted, every eye observed the twin engine propeller driven plane.

"Probably the Ugandan military having a look." Said Todd.

"Most likely a local news crew operating out of Kampala." Said Doc.

"I'm not picking up any thoughts at all." Said Ruby.

"It's all the energy still in the atmosphere." Said Kallina. "We'll have trouble picking up any thoughts at a distance for days."

"Whoever they are, we need to begin the descent." Said Rory.

Ruby liked Rory; she liked him quite a lot. Kallina had been right, he was her usual type. Ludicrously age inappropriate, certain to have a tragic past, and he was taciturn to the point of being perpetually surly. She thought the world of Todd, but Kallina had been right about her attraction to Rory. All that aside, she was going to overrule his decision.

"Not yet, we'll give the tunnel another hour to cool." She said.

"Why?" Asked Rory.

She never had been one of those leaders who simply barked, because I said so, at her people. There was the occasional reminder that they weren't a democracy, though that had become a bit of a group joke lately.

"I could go on about the likelihood of us having to fight our way down the last part of the tunnel.

Fighting Nagala in somewhere with hot and humid conditions with inexperienced fighters.....

Mainly though, I'm thinking of Anna." She said. "So we're going to give it another hour."

"Fine." Snapped Rory.

Someone else who used fine when they weren't fine at all and really meant bitch. Todd was grinning at her though, which was something. The plane made its second pass at about five hundred feet. As if by instinct Ruby waved at the plane and noticed a lot of the others were waving too.

"It'll be NBS TV news Ruby." Said Doc. "You'll be seen waving on every TV in Kampala by tonight."

The aircraft flew over another three times, before heading away to the west.

"If they had HD cameras, they have your face." Said Tlal. "They'll have all our faces."

"It's a clear cloudless morning, the satellites will already have every face." Said Ruby. "Are you still alright to carry Anna?"

Tlal had a nice smile, once you got past the strangeness of some of her features. She'd never need a label on her lapel to tell anyone who got a close look, that she wasn't completely human. Her smile was pleasant though.

"Of course, she is so small... Like a child." Said Tlal. "I can carry her strapped to my back like a baby in a.....There is a word for it.....Yes, papoose. Snug as a baby in a papoose."

Tlal had muscles in places where a lot of people didn't even have places. She'd be able to carry Anna the two and a bit miles down the shaft with ease. Anna hadn't been too keen on the idea, but Ruby hadn't given her much of a choice. There had even been a short version of the we're not a democracy speech.

"Thank you Tlal, that means a lot to me." Said Ruby.

Two more aircraft flew over while they waited for the tunnel to cool and the humidity to drop. Both were military jets moving quickly at just under where the cloud cover would have been, if there had been any clouds that morning. Kallina thought she sensed a third jet travelling really high, but she hadn't been certain. Rory didn't say anything, but his look definitely shouted 'I told you so.' Ten minutes before they were due to begin the descent, Kallina gave the strange warning cry she reserved for wide outdoor places. A mixture of a shriek and something going on at the back of her throat. The sound travelled for miles and definitely had everyone's attention. It reminded Ruby of the noise she'd heard a camel herder use in Uzbekistan, to call his beasts.

"Something is coming up the tunnel." Shouted Kallina.

Ruby joined her and soon Charlotte was there too, all three of them staring down the tunnel.

“Three of them.....Angry, aggressive and huge.” Said Charlotte. “Moving fast too..... We’ll have company in less than twenty minutes.”

Ruby had been right, but for the wrong reason. If they’d run into the Nagala a quarter of a mile down the tunnel, it would have been carnage. Ruby looked at Rory and hoped his antitank guns were as good as he’d boasted.

“We’ve got three Nagala coming up the pipe.” She shouted at him.

“How long have we got ?”

“Call it fifteen minutes.”

Just about everyone was behind the heavy weapons anyway, but that didn’t stop all three of the British soldiers from yelling instructions.

“Everyone behind the antitank guns.....Now!” Shouted Rory.

“If you can fire a gun, find one.” Yelled Todd.

Even Graham the tech guy joined in, and Ruby had never heard him raise his voice before.

“Keep your heads down and stay put.” He shrieked.

They did it well, those soldiers. They yelled without drowning each other out, as though they’d attended lectures on shouting at people during periods of extreme danger. Ruby had to give it to them though, they got everyone organised and under cover, quicker than she could have done it.

“Any minute now, I can hear their claws on the rock floor.” Shouted Kallina.

Kallina was the last to leave the top of the tunnel, becoming Baba Yaga as she arrived next to Ruby.

Baba Yaga, with her feet hovering a good foot above the ground. Baba Yaga with red hot fire beginning to form in her hands. Ruby had seen her reduce a large house to rubble in a matter of seconds. Did they really need the modern heavy weapons with an angry Baba Yaga stood facing the enemy ? Ruby put the soldiers and their technology into the ‘it can’t hurt box,’ where she kept many other things.

“I see one !” Shouted Sophie.

Ruby didn’t get long to look at the creatures, before the antitank guns and Baba Yaga’s fire, filled her vision with smoke and flames. There was a certain unreality about the sheer size of the Nagala.

Definitely feline in appearance, but larger and fiercer than any big cat she’d ever seen. Seeing them in the race memories shown to her by the Arbiters, hadn’t prepared her for the reality of the brutes. When she’d been young, there had been a school trip to The Natural History Museum. There had been a well-made and terrifying, life sized model of a Sabre-toothed Tiger. To a tiny nine year old Ruby that model of a monster cat had been terrifying, yet it was nothing compared to the monsters rushing out of the tunnel.

“Fire !” Yelled Rory.

As the antitank guns began to fire, Baba Yaga let loose a wall for fire in the direction of the Nagala. Ruby couldn’t see to aim, but she sent off a force wall larger than she’d ever used before. The others were using their special skills too. She could feel Charlie using fire and Sophie trying to drain the life essence from the terrible creatures, the ancient Das Geheimnis had created.

“It must be enough to destroy them.” Muttered Ruby. “It has to be enough.”

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Eugenie had been right to be wary of frightening Gérard Villand. He wasn’t exactly surrounded by his minions, but there were four guarding him in a fairly small room. Behind a door to his right, another three waited, though she didn’t spend too long running her mind over theirs. Villand was the centre of her attention and he was giving off waves of stress and tension.

“Well, I did wonder if you’d show up.” Said Villand. “Come in please, have a seat. No business until we’ve attended to the niceties. I believe civilisation isn’t about literature or diplomacy, it’s all about correctly observing the niceties..... Sit.”

There was only one chair for her sit in and it was right in front of his desk. Just close enough so that she could have touched his desk by stretching a little. The expression about cutting the atmosphere with a knife seemed to have been created for such meetings.

“You must try the coffee Eugenie, one of my young friends is a true genius at getting decent coffee out of our rather dated coffee machine.” Said Villand. “There are also some nibbles, which I sent someone out for.”

“Yes, thank you.....I’d love coffee and whatever there is in the way of nibbles.” She said.

Villand hadn’t introduced himself yet and she was happy to play his game about observing the niceties. It gave her time to run a mental hand over everyone in the room, without it being too obvious. Villand himself looked quite old, with a face where wrinkles were competing for space. Anyone involved with the French security services for that long, at a senior level, had probably picked up a few rumours about wunderkinds with strange gifts. That probably explained his current level of anxiety. One in a few hundred could feel their minds were being examined in some way. A really tiny percentage, but it had caused the death of Ruby’s lover Jurgis. Very gently, Eugenie allowed herself to pick up the general background noise in Villand’s head. One name stood out among the anxiety and his wish to regain control. Villand was wondering if she was one of Ruby’s special people. Ruby, Ruby, Ruby.....He was rolling the name about in his mind. Coffee and nibbles arrived and Eugenie shuffled her chair closer to his desk without asking.

“Yes, yes.....Mara really does do wonders with the coffee machine.” Said Villand.

He’d given her a name, without even being asked. A mistake, even if the name was false. The woman carrying the tray reacted to her name and Eugenie had another name linked to a face. Eugenie sipped the coffee and nibbled at a slightly stale pastry of some kind.

“You’re right, the coffee is perfect.” She said.

Gérard Villand was like a huge spider at the centre of his web. The office was probably one of several he borrowed and she doubted of he’s use it again for months. Clever, but definitely one of the dinosaurs of the intelligence community. His dark brown eyes were alert, but there was a slight wheezing sound as he breathed. Not that she was going to write him off as a harmless old man, he was far too dangerous.

“Introductions....Yes.....As I’m sure you know my name is Gérard Villand, though I’m also known by several other names. Anonymity and a variety of aliases tend to be the norm in my line of work. As I’m sure you’re also aware, I am a freelance.....Obtainer of information. Currently I’m being employed by the French security services.”

Eugenie had once had a long conversation with Spider, after an Indian meal and far too many shots of tequila. Who had seduced who was still open to discussion, but she had slept with him. Not just the once either, though neither of them had intended it to be a lasting relationship. Early one morning when they were at the pillow talk stage, he’d given her his theory about something he called Ruby’s low level whammy.

“Sarah has noticed it too, it isn’t just me.” He’d told her. “Ruby can turn a hostile room into friends, just by being there. I don’t think she even knows she’s doing it. Sometimes she’ll even know something I never told her, yet she denies probing my mind.”

“Nonsense, you’re imagining it.” She’d told him. “Wunderkind phobia or something, from being around her so much.”

“No, definitely not Eugenie. It’s real.....Think back and I bet you’ve noticed it too, but never thought much about it. My guess is that she has some sort of automatic defence system that attempts to put a low level whammy on everyone around her. You might all have it.”

She had thought about it, there had even been conversations with Sophie and Charlotte about it. Eventually they’d all come over to Spider’s idea that something was going on. Ruby did seem to be broadcasting some kind of empathy whammy, but on a very low level. Could she do it too ? Eugenie was beginning to feel everyone in the room relax and wondered if her unconscious mind was up to something.

“Do you ever work for private clients ?” She asked Villand.

She gave him a smile, with a little something added to it. Not enough influence to worry his group of guards, no making him too friendly, far too quickly.

“Sometimes, if I know the client well and the money is right. Why Eugenie, are you about to offer me a job ?”

One of his minions chuckled, until Villand glared at them. He obviously liked to keep his employees on a tight leash. Eugenie felt her first and most important task had been completed. She was certain that she’d used enough influence on him, to guarantee Villand wouldn’t have her killed. She moved onto the more flexible and slightly nebulous part of her mission.

“The people I represent do have access to deep pockets, so we could afford your services. Ruby has quite a lot of contacts, some of whom are very influential.”

Naming Ruby set his mind racing. He began to bounce her name about in his head again, playing with the way it sounded. He was still smiling at her though.

“I did wonder if you were one of Ruby Mason’s people.” He said. “Are you one of her wunderkinds, her..... Das Geheimnis ? I hope I pronounced that correctly ?”

“I am and yes, you did get the name right. You’ve obviously got a good memory and access at the highest level. I’m told French security services have a special secure room for all the files on Das Geheimnis.”

His slightly tired looking eyes observed her for a while. Villand had obviously been thinking over his options and how much his own bunch of young people knew.

“Everyone out, I need to talk to Eugenie alone.” He said. “No listening on the stairs, I want you all to wait in the downstairs kitchen until I call you..... Go on.... Vanish.”

The girl called Mara wasn’t happy about leaving. She was stood at the door, looking at Villand as though he might get hurt, or worse. Villand had it, whatever it was ? Ruby had a theory that charisma was just a way for humans to explain an unconscious gift they’d largely lost. Some still had it though, the ability to influence others without seeming to do much at all.

“I’ll be alright Mara.... Go on Shoo.....I’m sure if Eugenie and her people meant me any harm, I’d be dead by now.”

The irony of the situation wasn’t lost on her. After worrying about being killed before she could use her gifts on Villand, Eugenie found herself trying to reassure an upset looking Mara.

“I came here to talk, nothing more.” She said. “You have my word Mara.”

“Hurt him and I will find you.”

“That’s enough Mara, you know how I detest bad manners. Go.....Off with you, before I lose my temper.”

The girl went and Eugenie had to ask the question, even though she thought she already knew the answer.

“Such loyalty.....Is she related to you ?”

“No, just someone who’d lost her way before we found her. Now Eugenie, tell me the real reason for your visit ?”

Eugenie smiled at him and he was hers, but only up to a point. The truth was that she needed Villand complete with all the neurosis and paranoia that were part and parcel of his chosen career. Putting too much whammy on him might well disrupt the mental abilities that made him what he was.

“You’re running an operation at Malou’s hotel. That causes Ruby a few problems. Malou was the lady who took her in and helped her, when like your Mara, she had lost her way.”

“I can hardly refuse to run surveillance on the hotel.” He said. “Just doing so would confirm the suspicions my employers already have about the place.”

“You mean a connection with the disappearance of the Ostbys ?” She asked.

“Yes I do. You obviously know Monique’s father was a bit of a national hero from the old days.”

Eugenie had pictures of Pablo’s men, which she put on the table. She placed her index finger on the picture of Christophe.

“These are the men you’re looking for and this one is dead.” She said. “The other two need to be able to come and go from the hotel. All I’m asking is for you to report to your employer that neither of these two men, has been seen in the area. There will of course, be a financial reward for your services. Think of it as being paid twice for the same job.”

“What else ? Come on, there has to be something else ?”

There was of course, there had to be the bit of the conversation that told Villand what was in it for him, if they began a long term relationship. He might be too polite to say it, but they’d definitely reached the ‘what’s in it for him,’ stage.

“One area has become a problem for us in several locations around the world.” She said. “That is the importance of local knowledge, or rather the lack of it. Here in Paris Malou’s contacts are fairly elderly and some will be retiring soon. Which means she loses access to their networks. We could build our own network like yours, but to be honest.....We’d probably never come up with anything as good as yours.”

Gérard Villand was happy, it came off him in waves. If he’d been a chicken he’d have been strutting up and down.

“So..... You need my people as your eyes and ears in Paris. That makes sense.” He said.

“There could be other services too.....Things to be collected or delivered, important things.”

“We can do that.....Look, we can agree the details, but..... No offence Eugenie, but I’d like to meet Ruby at some point. She has become a bit of a living legend in the intelligence community.”

“No offence taken. She’s not in Europe at the moment, but when she returns I’m sure we can arrange something better than just a meeting. Perhaps a meal at the hotel one evening ?”

“That would be perfect.” Said Villand.

Tying up the deal took until well after dawn on a new day. Details were where the devil hid, as everyone knew. Eugenie had committed Ruby to paying Villand’s fee, or maybe George would pay it. Eugenie was just glad it didn’t have to come out of her pocket. Mara drove her back to the hotel in a fairly comfortable, if elderly Toyota Prius.

“He’s alright you know..... Don’t believe what they say about him.”

Said the girl as she dropped her off.

“People seldom are what people say about them.” Said Eugenie.

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Lily parked her car and as she usually did when he was working that side of the yard, she waved at the man operating the mechanical grab. Things were almost back to normal at the British security

service office that pretended to be a car breaker's yard. The new metal external door was a fixture now according to the lady in HR who seemed to be the fount of all knowledge. There was only one man outside the door now, though he was still dressed in intimidating looking body armour.

"Morning miss." He said to her.

"Good morning."

She could use her swipe card on the door again, rather than being scanned for biometric data. Along the corridor, where two armed men still sat, in what had become known as the guard room. Left at the end of the corridor and she was at the place where the poor young security guard had been killed. There had been a dark mark on the floor, a stain no amount of cleaning seemed to shift. In the end Foxy had signed a requisition to get an entire section of flooring replaced.

"Good morning Bob."

"Morning Lily."

Bob was coming down the stairs, which meant she'd find a tray full of internal mail waiting for her. The cameras at the top of the stairs were new and another fixture after the attack. Two cameras set to look for the movement of something with little or no body heat. The office comedians had already christened them vampire cams. With luck they'd pick up any further intrusions by the rogue Das Geheimnis. Lily grabbed the contents of the post tray on the table outside and unlocked the office door.

"Home sweet home." She muttered.

Probably imagination, but she was sure there was still the smell of wet paint from the all the repairs and redecoration. Her domain had been done over in white emulsion, and Foxy had chosen the usual civil service beige. Boring, but at the least the office looked clean and tidy. She banged on Foxy's door, even though he was supposed to be in Glasgow all day. Lily had a key to his office now and still got a buzz out of using it.

"Are you there ?..... Do you fancy a coffee ?"

No answer, it looked like she had the place to herself for the entire day. Lily went through the morning routine of filling the coffee machine and listing all the incoming post in a book. Yes, the modern service still wanted a handwritten log of all incoming post. There had even been a book for outgoing faxes, until no one used the fax machine for over a year. After an hour, maybe two, she had to admit the truth, though she did it in a whisper.

"Ohhhh I'm bored."

There was plenty to do of course, she just didn't fancy doing any of it. As always when boredom began to make her fidget about, she headed towards the box on the wall. Another key she was proud to have, she could get at the energy weapon, the rogue killer. Lily looked at the serious looking weapon and couldn't resist stroking it.

"Hmmmmm." She mumbled.

A new version of the weapon, the original design had been revised. The power pack was smaller and was supposed to fire for twice as long without recharging. Other than that, the new version wasn't that different to the old ones in the basement storage area. Lily locked the box and went back to her desk.

"You know the service Lily." Foxy had said to her. "The old version weapons will be in the basement lock up for years, maybe forever. I'm sure you'll find a faulty musket somewhere in the MOD, waiting for someone to look at it."

Foxy laughed at all the bureaucracy and pointless procedures, but it still irked her sometimes. Lily was beginning to form an idea in her head, that just might blossom into a full blown plan. She used

her own cellphone to call The Polandrous Foundation. Her call was answered by a female voice, who sounded far too perky for eleven thirty on a dull, cloudy morning.

“Hello, Polandrous Foundation.....Can I help you ?”

“Good morning, could I speak to Eugenie please ?”

“I’m afraid Eugenie isn’t in the office for a few days. Could anyone else help ?”

Yes, of course they could. When she thought about it, there was only one person close to George, who might be able to help her get things organised.

“Is Penny in today ?” She asked.

“Yes, who’s calling ?”

“Lily, she does know me.”

There were quite a few rings of the phone at the other end. Time for Lily to think of any number of reasons for calling Penny that morning. The plan was risky, illegal and.....Crap! It was probably treason. By the time Penny picked up the phone, Lily had mentally committed herself to a highly risky course of action.

“Hi Lily, so nice to speak you, it’s been a while.”

“I think we need to meet to discuss something Penny. Something too important to talk about it over the phone.”

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