

Ruby V : Machu Picchu

Chapter 9 – Funeral In Paris

“Strange how stressful good news can be, Cal looked as though she might collapse. Chris had heard that getting married was more stressful than a death in the family.”

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Ruby looked into his smiling eyes.

“Tell me.....What is your full name ?” She asked.

The fake Serge was a Colombian called David Henao. She knew his name, nationality and age, before his lips had answered her first question. Not only eager to please, David was also just about the most suggestible person she’d ever given her special smile. It was almost as if his mind couldn’t wait to bring up the memories that interested her.

“David.....David Henao.” He said.

“Did they show you pictures of Serge ?” Asked Ruby.

“Yes, books full of them.”

“How about video recordings ? Were you shown those too ?”

“Yes....He said it was important to get the walk right.....The walk is the key, he kept telling me. Get the walk right and I’d look like Serge, even at a distance.”

Still eager to please, but his memories were becoming an excited jumble. Images of Serge passed by, like a badly edited documentary. There were a few moving images that Ruby had never seen before, some with Serge in a military uniform. Through it all was the repeated image of the man who’d hired and trained David Henao. Useless to her, there was the way David viewed the man to take into account. Every image of him was just a huge heap of American dollars. Forever, David would think of the man as a massive pile of cash. It would have been amusing if it hadn’t been so frustrating. There was a name to go with the pile of cash. Liam, just Liam.....No surname had popped out of David’s memory, not yet.

“Did he pay you well ?” Ruby asked.

“Yes, more than I could have made in a lifetime.”

Still just a pile of cash in his mind, though it was more colourful and Euro notes had been added to the pile. Still just Liam for a name and the world had to have a lot of guys called Liam. Lily was just sitting there, looking at David as though he might bite.

“Did Liam bring anyone else to train you ?” She asked.

Ruby always used names the person hadn’t verbally told her. It was usually an effective interrogation technique and at worst, it only produced a little anger. At the mention of Liam, David became extremely agitated.

“He meant to hurt you....Kill you.” Said David. “I knew, but he had so much money.....I’m so sorry.”

The knife must have been under the chair cushion. Her reaction to seeing an image of a blade in his mind, was to jump up and back. He hadn’t been tied up or duct taped, she’d never had anyone turn on her, not after giving them her special kind of whammy.

“He’s got a knife.” Said Lily.

No time for Lily to use the gun in her pocket, not that it mattered. The only person in the room David wanted to kill, was himself. The last images and feelings in his mind were of profound sorrow. He

hadn't been a bad man; just someone offered a lot of money to do something bad. He jammed the blade in, up under his chin and kept driving it in, really deep. He wanted to please her; he might even have thought he was in love with her. David died right there in front of them, before they'd had a chance to stop him. Poor Lily, all that training and no chance to use it.

"Fuck!" Said Lily. "Did you get enough out of his head?"

"Nowhere near enough." Said Ruby. "He was hired and trained by a man called Liam. No last name, though I suspect Liam was a forty a day smoker. David's memories are full of the smell of tobacco smoke."

"Doesn't narrow it down much."

"No, it doesn't.....When I get some quiet time, I'll examine what I pulled from his mind. With luck, there might be more clues. I just wish.....He died to please me. I should have given him a little less of my special smile."

"You weren't to know." Said Lily. "What next?"

"We search the apartment, very carefully and thoroughly."

There was nothing, apart from about a thousand Euros stuffed inside a pair of old trainers. No papers, no driving license, not even a personal credit card. The more they searched, the more the apartment looked like somewhere David didn't really call home. It was another hiding place, what Serge would have called a safe house. They were ready to leave, when Ruby thought of something. "Wipe the gun and leave it here." She said. "Not somewhere that looks like it was deliberately left behind."

"I noticed a meter cupboard....Perfect spot."

"It was his gun and the police will trace a full history for it." Said Ruby. "With luck.....And we need a little of that, there might be a couple of clues for us."

"Will the cops tell us?"

"No, but one of our new friends in DINI will." Said Ruby.

It took a while to find a taxi, but it was nice to be heading for home, or at least the hotel. Ruby could fully relax, after she'd told Lily she wasn't going to Paris for Villand's funeral.

"I think you should avoid going to Paris, Lily. Lots of intelligence community people will be there. The police will have photographers everywhere. I don't want you identified as the woman who used to work for Foxy.....It might put you at risk."

"Yes, I understand.....To be honest, I'd prefer to stay here, in Peru." Said Lily.

"Good....Good."

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It wasn't a surprise to Chris; she had known there'd be a telephone call about it, probably several. The police have to check quite a few things; there were probably a few forms on their way in the post. Then there was the whole immigration thing, which could turn into a nightmare. Ruby had a truly astonishing number of influential contacts, but even she couldn't totally circumvent all the bumf UK immigration were likely to want filled in. No, none of that had surprised Chris. What had surprised her was the speed everything was happening at. Ruby and her friends had obviously been pestering the right people. It was a typical night in the Hackney flat, with the remains of a Thai meal on the coffee table and a Netflix rom-com on the TV. Cal was so excited as she hung up the phone, that she looked in danger of hyperventilating.

"He's coming to London, my brother is being released." Said Cal.

"Who was it on the phone?" Asked Chris.

“Some solicitors hired by Ruby. She’s been saying all along that Abe had to realise there are consequences to what he does. Now she’s hiring expensive solicitors.....I’m glad she did, but she never told me about it.”

“What was the name of the solicitors ?” Asked Chris. “They must have introduced themselves.”

“Godfrey, Spence and.....Someone.”

“Godfrey, Spence & Grainger ?” Asked Chris.

“Yes, that was the name.....Are they any good ?”

“They are the best and very expensive. Ruby must be paying them a small fortune. Did they say what happens next ?”

Strange how stressful good news can be, Cal looked as though she might collapse. Chris had heard that getting married was more stressful than a death in the family. She held Cal’s hand and waited for her to answer the question.

“Err.....Monique has to sign for Abe as his sponsor.” Said Cal. “It seems she’s my sponsor too, so I can live in the UK. I never knew any of this.....Ruby is arranging for me to live in London, legally.”

“When, Cal.....When will you brother be here ?” Asked Chris.

“The weekend, the lady on the phone said he’d be here by the weekend.”

Cal let out a whoop and Chris joined in. Stressful or not, there is something about good news. They were soon laughing and discussing giving Abe the grand tour of that part of Hackney. Even Constanze seemed happy, as she sat on Cal’s lap, while purring like crazy.

“You know what we should do ?” Asked Chris.

“No, what ?”

“You should get some cash out of the drawer.....We need a trip to the pub.” Said Chris.

“Yay, a trip to the pub.”

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To Malou it wasn’t burying a dinosaur in the Père Lachaise Cemetery. The others might have viewed Gérard Villand as the last of the old school DGSE agents. Who else had fought in Algeria and was still around to talk about it ? Malou had worked with Villand, they’d almost been lovers. His reputation with women had put her off, a reluctance to be just another notch on his bedpost.

“Oscar Wilde is buried here.” Said Malou. “And Jim Morrison..... Gérard would have liked that.”

“Who is picking up the bill for a burial in Père Lachaise ?” Asked George Polandrous.

Malou had to turn and smile at George; it was a kind of rhetorical question. They both knew the answer.

“No one George, the same no one who managed to get around the huge waiting list.”

Just a simple plot in the ground, nothing fancy for Gérard, he wouldn’t have liked anything too fussy. There was already a huge and growing mountain of flowers next to the open grave. Many mourners too and Malou had spotted at least three photographers. She knew there’d be others, some of them hiding among the trees and bushes. Those would be collecting pictures for the Europol database, or the CIA computers in Langley, or the MI6 records in Vauxhall.

“How do you have a waiting list for a funeral ?” Asked George.

“Best not to think about it.” Said Malou. “They’re probably frozen for years....Like a giant popsicle.”

“Ewwwww.”

“I can see Charlotte.” Said Malou.

Charlotte dressed in black and on her own, it could have summed up her life recently. Charlie had been damaged by events in Norway and she was still healing. The crowd was growing, large enough to excuse a wave and a shout.

“Charlie.....Over here.” Shouted Malou.

Charlotte dropped her own bouquet onto the pile, before waving back. The way Charlie moved as she walked towards them, looked like a demonstration of repressed power and strength. Why had she turned up for Villand’s burial ? Malou had given up speculating on that. Of course, George hugged her; he still treated all the wunderkinds as though he was their favourite uncle. In many ways he still was.

“On your own.....I thought you’d have found Sophie by now.” Said George.

“She was talking to Mara.” Said Charlie. “I’ll find her later on; we’ve a lot to catch up on..... I saw the defence minister in amongst the trees. Keeping a low profile, but she’s here.”

“The French one....I thought it was a man in the job.” Said Malou.

“No, ours.....The one from London.” Said Charlie. “It seems a lot of political heavyweights are here, to give him a good send off.”

“Some will think he’s still alive.....Like Elvis.” Muttered George.

Malou wanted to tell George off, but Charlie was laughing, so what the hell. There would be those who believed Villand was in hiding. Dear Gérard had that kind of reputation. Autopsies could be rigged, police and doctors bought. In a post truth era, anything seemed possible.

“Have you seen Ruby ?” Asked Malou.

“Not yet, but I will make sure I do.”

“Ahh, it begins.....The Clergyman is here.” Said George.

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Ruby knew the man talking to Mara, though she had never been officially given his name. Names were her thing though, the beginning of any delving into the mind of another. The ancient seers had been right in a way; there was real power to be gained by knowing someone’s given name. Especially in an age when just about everything was online, somewhere. Darius was his first name; yes the CIA’s top guy in France really was called Darius, Darius T Weisbaum to be precise. It sounded so hokey, that Ruby had thought it might be a made up name. No, Foxy had assured her that Darius was the genuine article. Not someone she usually thought of with any affection, he’d tried to have Foxy take her off the investigation in North Korea. Funerals were considered neutral territory, everyone knew that. It didn’t mean Ruby couldn’t have a little fun. She nodded at Mara.

“It’s a good turnout, Mara.” Said Ruby. “Everyone from a UK defence minister, to the CIA’s European head of station.”

Ruby nodded at Darius, causing him to noticeably bristle. Strange how useless he was at hiding his emotional body language, for a spy.

“Ruby, I heard you were in South America.” Said Darius. “I never heard if it was Brazil, or maybe Argentina.”

“Peru, Darius.....As I’m sure you know.” Said Ruby. “I owe you a thank you I believe, for leaning on the right people to get Abe Duale released.”

“Did I ? If you say so.....A troubled young man, Ruby.” Said Darius. “You’ll need to watch that one.”

Darius wandered off, in that casual fashion only spies can really pull off. It was actually a relief to be alone with Mara. Darius had helped with the Abe situation, but she’d never really trust him.

“Did he really help you ?” Asked Mara.

“Yes, after just one phone call from Foxy.....I was surprised it was that easy.”

“He’ll want something.....Soon he’ll want a favour in return.” Said Mara.

“I know.....I can see what you mean about photographers.” Said Ruby. “I can sense about half a dozen of them in amongst the bushes.”

“Yes, everyone from the local police to the CIA.” Said Mara. “Villand knew everyone and where a lot of skeletons are buried. They’ll all be here, all of the intelligence community. I’ve seen a senior woman from the Russian FSB and a Chinese cultural attaché. Aria said she saw a man trying to take pictures inside the funeral chapel.....Worse than animals, some of them.”

Mara looked at her and smiled.

“Sorry.....I’ve been working long hours.” Said Mara. “I know the industry and what goes on. After all, it’s how our strange and dysfunctional family earns a living. You’re invited by the way, to my official coronation as head of the family.”

“I’ll be there.....Where is it happening ?”

“I’ll make sure someone sends you a text with the address.....We need to be at the graveside. I’m just about all Gérard had in the way of family.”

Villand had looked after dozens of kids, a huge and constantly changing family. Ruby knew what Mara meant though; she’d been given his empire to rule. Along with that empire came the large family of refugees and runaways from right across the globe.

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Sophie wasn’t that worried about Caleb being spotted by the people taking pictures. Yes, he was on just about everyone’s list, the report if seen list. FBI, CIA, FSB, MI6.....Were all known to want a chat with him, after various incidents during his career as a data courier. It was thought that even Mossad wanted to talk to him. Funerals were neutral ground though, everyone knew that. However many alarm bells might be ringing, in whatever countries, no one would try and grab him at Villand’s funeral. At least according to Ruby, who had added a ‘probably’ to the statement.

“Crap, Caleb.” Said Sophie. “Is there any organisation known by three letters, who doesn’t want you in an interrogation room ?”

“Thinking about it, the DEA have never shown any interest in me.” Said Caleb. “And there is still some suspicion that the NSA don’t really exist, so I’m not counting them.”

Sophie had been worried about him wearing jeans and a T shirt, but Caleb had scrubbed up well. A brand new out of the box shirt and tie. Todd had helped him choose a suit at a place near the airport. A dark blue single breasted, off the peg job, which fitted him perfectly. Sophie was actually feeling quite proud of him, even if it did sometimes feel like dating America’s most wanted.

“So.....The NSA are just a figment of everyone’s imagination ?” She asked.

“For years the government refused to admit they existed.” Said Caleb. “Just another covert black ops group, or so everyone thought at the time. Totally deniable of course, if they fucked up in a major way.”

For someone who still had a lot of secrets in his head, she had noticed his idea of a low voice, carried quite some distance. A lady passing them, looked quite put out by his profanity.

“Behave.....If you must swear, keep it to a whisper.” Said Sophie.

“Sorry.”

She took him down the side of the chapel. From there Sophie could see whether they were getting ready to lower Villand’s coffin into the ground.

“So.....How did a black ops organisation become something that might not exist ?” She asked.

“Hey, it isn’t my theory; I’m sat on the fence. The NSA was being mentioned a lot at the time, being blamed for anything even slightly clandestine. They got a mention on the X Files for.....Flip sake, so they had to be fake, right ?”

“Yeah, but.....I’m sure Ruby has a phone number for a couple of people at this fake federal organisation.”

“Ahh, my dear naïve Sophie, that means nothing.” Said Caleb. “The theory is that someone in the CIA, realised how valuable a fake NSA might be. No matter how huge the balls up, it wasn’t Langley’s fault, it was them....The clowns at the NSA. Everyone got in on the act, from the FBI right through to alcohol, tobacco and firearms. I heard even the wildlife people blamed the NSA for a polluted river in West Virginia. So, the NSA was sort of born.....Merely as a federal bogeyman, someone to blame for every screw up.”

A huge joke of course, though Caleb seemed really into it. Sophie noticed the clergyman was approaching where all the mourners had grouped together.

“We should find a place near the grave, or we won’t see anything.” She said.

“I don’t think there is much to see.....At funerals.”

Caleb could be surprising and he took her hand and led her towards where the Père Lachaise staff, were preparing to lower Villand’s coffin into the ground. A rich loamy soil, Sophie noticed it for the first time.

“Do you really believe all that ?” She asked. “That the NSA is just a weird construct, invented as a non-existent wiping boy for the CIA and others ?”

“As I said, I’m on the fence. A great idea though and I’m told it makes a great conversation starter at CIA get togethers.”

They had a good spot, to watch the coffin go into the ground. Sophie had no idea what religion Villand belonged to, if any. The Clergyman looked to be something orthodox, judging by his robes. There was even a young boy swinging an incense burner.

“Why are we here, Sophie ?” Caleb whispered. “The truth.....What was Villand to you ?”

“He had me tied up and moved across Paris in the dark, inside a van.....Then he served me coffee and a fresh croissant. That coffee was the best I’ve ever tasted. He was a good man, one of the best, one of the old school.”

“Yeah....I can see that.”

“You can ? I always thought you were a bit strange, Caleb Friedman.” She whispered.

Sophie kissed Caleb on the cheek, just as Mara was throwing a handful of loamy soil into Villand’s grave.

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Eugenie had to be there, though she too, had no real idea why. Villand was one of those people; he seemed to bring out loyalty in those around him. For a while Eugenie had been the liaison, the person who dealt with Villand and his family. She paid them and asked for information, which was then passed to Ruby, or Malou. Often boring, until she’d accidentally seen the dead bodies in a warehouse. So much blood. That had been during the long running war with Gallaan Industries. She’d seen the body of a young Bosnian boy, one of the voiceless refugees given a home by Villand. That day things had changed, Eugenie had changed.

“I’m glad you brought me with you.” Said Lorenzo. “This place is famous..... Frédéric Chopin is buried here, and Édith Piaf.”

“And Gertrude Stein.” Said Eugenie. “I have a guide to who is buried where. We can go and look at a few famous graves after we’ve watched them bury Villand.”

They’d already briefly talked to Ruby and Todd. Todd kept going on about Karl Marx being buried in Highgate Cemetery, as though it was some kind of competition. Our dead celebrity trumps yours, kind of thing. Eugenie was there to watch Gérard Villand laid to rest. Yes, seeing where Gertrude Stein was buried would be nice, but she was mainly there to say farewell to Villand.

“Is this as close as we’re getting ?” Asked Lorenzo.

“Yes, I’ll see them all tonight.....We’ve been invited to Mara’s coronation, her swearing to the sacred oaths, or something like that.”

“Where is it being held ?” Asked Lorenzo.

“I can’t tell you.”

“Seriously ?”

“This is their world, Lol.” She said. “We go by their rules here. Ruby won’t have told Todd either, if that helps.”

“Yeah, maybe a little.”

Eugenie had seen Aria near the chapel, the sweet Algerian girl who’d had to grow up way too fast. Vadim was among the crowd near the grave. He’d been born in Belarus, but now thought of Paris as his home. So many faces she recognised. Such a large family and they were all still precious to her. For some reason, it was all so much easier to watch at a bit of a distance.

“So many people.....It’s like half of Paris came to say goodbye.” Said Lorenzo.

“Lots of cops with cameras, so we’ll both be on a lot of databases by tomorrow.”

“I’m sure we’re already on quite a few.” Said Lorenzo. “I’ll put our flowers on the pile....Stay here if you want to.”

It took him a while to get through the crowd, the clergyman in all the fancy clothing, was beginning to say holy words over the coffin. Not that Eugenie necessarily believed in any of it, but like most people, she was keeping her options open. An atheist aunt of hers had started reading the bible after being diagnosed with cancer. Not so much as a conversion, as keeping her options open. Looking for a loophole as W C Fields had once said. Eugenie watched as Lorenzo added their bouquets to the growing flower mountain.

“Oh Villand.....Forgive me for once hating you.” She muttered. “You were very hard to like, way back then.”

“I’m sure he does, forgive you.”

Aria next to her, the damned girl could have crept up unseen on a dozen cats. It was automatic, they hugged one another.

“I always assumed Villand was indestructible.” Said Eugenie. “Mara will be good though, she’ll keep the family together.”

“Are you going to her coronation ?” Asked Aria.

“Yes.....Lorenzo was invited too.”

“He looks nice.” Said Aria.

“He is.....Very.”

By the time Lorenzo was back, Aria and her were crying. Crying for Villand of course, though funerals always filled Eugenie with deep existential angst. Kallina had always said that funerals were all about tears. If there were no tears, people didn’t heal. Thinking about Kallina, made her cry even harder. Lorenzo was a keeper, probably the one, the future father of her children. He thoughtfully held Aria’s hand, even though he’d have no idea who she was.

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The coronation was going to happen in the warehouse of a shipping company. Villand seemed to have known the owners of quite a few freight and shipping companies. It was about the third Villand family meeting Ruby had been to in such a place, maybe the fourth. Pallets of boxes had been moved back against the walls, to be moved back once the coronation was over. An hour after everyone had left; there’d be no trace of the event held there. It was perfect, typical Villand old school. Only now it was Mara organising things, even her own coronation.

“Gérard ran his unorthodox information business for over sixty years.” Said Mara. “Plans were put in place for when he was no longer here, but there was no procedure for selecting a successor.”

“I know he thought of you as the next head of the family.” Said Eugenie.

“Yes, but there was no procedure in place and the family don’t like change.” Said Mara. “People think the elderly like things to stay the same. They’re nothing compared to young people. I’m giving them a chance to choose me. No vote, just a shout if they’re agreeing with me taking over.”

“I can’t see them choosing anyone else.” Said Ruby.

“Neither do I, but I’m not taking anything for granted.” Said Mara.

“How old were you when you joined them ?” Asked Todd.

Ruby knew the story almost by heart; it was the way Mara used to introduce new kids into the group. Now someone like Aria would be using her own story.

“To know that, I’d need to be certain of my birthday.” Said Mara. “I was thirteen, maybe fourteen. There were reasons for me wanting to get away from my family. Villand gave me a place to sleep and two decent meals every day. Most importantly, he gave me a purpose.”

“How many are in the family ?” Asked Lorenzo.

Mara laughed, it was one of the questions everyone asked.

“That is a.....Secret.” Said Mara. “We’re split up into groups all over Paris, so there are times when I’m not sure. They come and go.....A few return to help us, when they’re solid citizens with a family of their own. Exact numbers though.....Let’s say, you’ll see most of them very soon.”

“We should let Mara get dressed for the big occasion.” Said Ruby.

Mara was creating a tradition that hadn’t really existed. A queen of rags costume, with a colourful cloak put on over the top, when they accepted her as leader. For kids that didn’t like change, they were seeing quite a lot of it. Ruby walked behind a pile of boxes, with the others following her. There could be no long preamble, the coronation would soon begin.

“I need you Eugenie; someone is burning down houses in Lima.” Said Ruby. “Someone is needed to watch our backs and you’re perfect for the job.”

“I have my own company now and a house in Milan.” Said Eugenie. “And I don’t want to be away from Lorenzo for months. Can’t Charlotte be your backup plan ?”

Charlotte had said she’d always help, if asked. Ruby didn’t like to say it, at least not to any of the wunderkinds. She no longer trusted Charlie though, not completely. Something had happened to Charlie after using her creature of fire skills. She had begun to enjoy the destruction she caused. Enjoying doing a job well was one thing, but Charlie was enjoying it far too much.

“Charlie is looking after Malou and the hotel.” Said Ruby. “You can bring Lorenzo with you, I’m sure he’d love Peru. All that history and beautiful scenery.”

“It could be a nice break.....Been a while since we were tourists.” Added Lorenzo.

“How about Lau, or Nari ?” Asked Eugenie.

“I’m not going through a list to end up with someone who has nothing better to do.”

Ruby gave Todd a brief tilt of her head, they were getting really good at using subtle body language, but so were most long term couples.

“Come on Lorenzo; let’s give the ladies a private moment.” Said Todd.

“Fine....But I’m happy to go to Peru.” Added Lorenzo.

Ruby let them wander away, before looking at Eugenie. The wunderkinds did still think of her as a second mother after Kallina, even Charlie. Now that Kallina was gone.....It was manipulation, but sometimes a few hurt looks worked.

“How bad are things with Charlotte ?” Asked Eugenie.

“On the surface things are fine.” Said Ruby. “Underneath though.....I think no one will see it coming, but I will need to fight with Charlie. Like a third world war, it will all be over quite fast. Will I win ? To be honest, I’m not sure. It has to happen though....One day.”

“I felt it brewing a long time ago.” Said Eugenie. “I’m sure most of us will be on your side.”

“No sides, there are already so few of us. When the time is right, I will act and I’ll do it on my own. It could be years in the future of course.”

“Or, next week.” Said Eugenie.

“Yes, it might be next week.”

They hugged and Ruby felt the gravel pathway vibrate slightly. It was what stress did; it caused their gifts to bubble up to the surface. Often with mild, but unforeseen effects.

“Alright.....Where do Lol and I head for, in Peru ?” Asked Eugenie.

“We’re all in a hotel in Huancayo and will be there for another week or so. I’ll give you the name of our hotel. Even if it’s full, there are lots of others. I’ve never known a city with quite so many hotels and restaurants. After we return to Lima, you can live in Alesia House, or use a hotel. Occupy the same personal space as us, or do your own thing with Lol....The choice is yours.”

“Sophie would never forgive me if I did my own thing.” Said Eugenie.

“Just check in once a day.....I have a bad feeling and you know all about my feelings.....”

“They’re nearly always right.” Muttered Eugenie.

Always right would have been better, but Ruby decided to let it go. A loud gong was sounding not far away, the coronation of Mara as head of the family, was about to begin.

“We must grab the guys.....We can’t miss Mara’s big moment.” Said Ruby.

“Supposing they reject her.....Do we do something ?”

“Like beat them all up ?.....Of course not.” Said Ruby. “Besides, I can’t see them rejecting Mara, she trained most of them from their first day in the family.”

Mara was stood on a platform made of large wooden boxes. She was in her clothing of rags and looked quite small, perched on her stage made of boxes.

“Yay....Mara.” Yelled Lorenzo.

Was it right to shout out, as though it was a football match ? Probably not, though that didn’t stop many from joining in. Young, old and a few in between, there were a lot of the family in the warehouse. Ruby found herself shouting, before Mara seemed properly prepared.

“Mara for leader !” Ruby yelled.

There were so many of them, there had to be hundreds of members of Villand’s family, now Mara’s family. Serge had once joked about them being the largest gang in Paris and Ruby could now understand why.

“Vive la reine Mara.” Someone yelled. ‘Long live Queen Mara.’

Mara was still pulling on her beautiful cloak, when Ruby had to put the question to the crowd, even though it wasn’t her job.

“Do you accept Mara as your leader ?”

Not just people shouting yes, they were stamping their feet and yelling for her. There wasn’t even a trace of dissent, or another name mentioned. That was good; the family needed stability of command. Ruby found herself shouting Mara over and over again, as the lady in question bowed towards her people. Eventually Mara raised her arms for silence.

“Thank you.....I will work hard to be worthy of your trust.” Mara shouted.

“Wow.” Eugenie hissed in Ruby’s ear.

Wow indeed. Ruby would have liked to have stayed for the inevitable party, but they were booked on an overnight flight out of Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport.

Spider had decided that if he had to pay to hire motorbikes again, it might be cheaper to buy one. The Honda was old and spluttered occasionally, but it meant they were mobile and fitted in with the locals. Everyone and their siblings, seemed to be hurtling around Huancayo on a noisy bike. Not Sarah on the back, he was being a bike chauffer for Lily. He'd looked up the route on a map, but still needed the occasional yelled instruction from Lily.

"Crap, that damned dog you mentioned is still barking." He said. "If I lived around here, I'd be banging on their door every night."

"As Ruby said last time, it's useful for us. No wide open windows on a warm night." Said Lily. Lily was one of those people who always used the word warm. Never hot, oh no. If it was fifty degrees with no humidity, she'd still say it was a bit warm. Spider brought the ancient hire bike to a stop and he could just about see the apartment where Ruby and Lily had left David's body and a gun with a history.

"Are we alright here, can you see what you need to see?" He asked.

"Yes, as good a spot as we're likely to find."

They got off the bike and Spider used the cable lock that came with the hire. He'd left a security deposit for the bike, that could have kept Beyoncé in sequins for a year. He was going to make sure no one ran off with it. They leant on the wall behind the bike, just like two teenagers doing what teenagers did.

"If anyone comes by, we can always pretend to snog for a while." Said Lily.

Spider couldn't help it; he had to give her his Sunday best grin. It earned him a thump on the arm, but he was beginning to like Lily. He knew he wasn't just there as a chauffer, he was also Lily's backup, her tough guy, just in case. Not that he was worried about the night ending in a fight. In fact, he was hoping it might. Vacations were fun, though deep down....Spider felt he wasn't earning his keep, if there was no one to thump.

"So.....We hang about and wait." He said.

"We made an anonymous call after leaving." Said Lily. "The police must have been through the place by now. I'm hoping the mysterious Liam, might think it's safe to return."

"It'd be a hell of a risk to take, for a few clean shirts and his boxer shorts." Said Spider.

"Yeah, I know it's a long shot.....But it's a nice night." Said Lily.

"If you ignore the dog."

Spider wasn't sure about the cops either; Lily was basing her times on London. Even there, he'd heard of the local boys in blue, taking over a day to turn up to an anonymous tip. Budgets were tight everywhere. There was a chance that the other residents of the apartment block, were just beginning to worry about the strange smell coming from apartment eleven. Best not to mention it to Lily, he didn't want to squash her obvious enthusiasm. A night time dog walker walked past them, a young woman with a tiny dog on a lead. For a few seconds Spider hugged Lily and put his head against hers. No kissing, all fake.....Though if he hadn't just had the conversation about children with Sarah.....

"Buenas noches." The dog walker muttered, as she went by.

Hugging Lily wasn't exactly a chore, but after two hours, Spider was beyond bored. They'd sat on the bike for a while and there had been two more pretend bits of canoodling. Maybe it was his bored frustration rubbing off on her, but after two and a half hours, Lily was ready to change her plan.

“We should go in there.....I hung onto the keys.” Said Lily. “For all we know, the cops might have ignored the anonymous call.”

“Yeah, at least then we’ll know.” Said Spider. “If we find the body still in there.....We can give the cops a more insistent call.”

There was the camera over the front door, but they’d just look like any other couple arriving at the block. Spider had a knife, a decent blade he’d acquired from a shop near the museum in Lima. A lock knife and probably illegal, but it hadn’t cost a fortune. He made sure he could get at it quickly, as Lily opened the front door. There was a slight chance that they’d spent two and a half hours, waiting for Liam to arrive. While he was already there.

“Up the stairs.....Door to the right.” Lily muttered.

Lily hadn’t mentioned the concrete floors; there had been no need to. Spider liked floors and stairs that didn’t creak. It also meant that if the body was beginning to decay, it wouldn’t start seeping down through the floorboards. Lily nodded at him as she put the key in the lock of number eleven. It was meant as a question and Spider nodded back. Fast through the door, quietly closing it once they were inside.

“Tobacco smoke.....Someone has been here tonight.” Muttered Lily. “I’ll take the bedrooms, you check over the lounge and kitchen.”

And suddenly Spider was coming out of neutral and beginning to enjoy himself. The curtains were open everywhere, had Ruby left them like that ? It gave him just about enough light from nearby street lamps, to avoid bumping into anything. There was the smell of smoking in the lounge and another odour, like shower gel, or maybe shampoo. Someone had been there. If they were still there, he wanted to draw them out.

“Check the shower.” He shouted.

It only seemed to take Lily a few seconds, though the adrenaline was probably beginning to affect his perception of time.

“Been used and still wet.” Yelled Lily.

“Careful.....I don’t think we’re alone.”

Through the kitchen door and the man came at him from the left. The bulk said it was a man, though there was a chance it was a well-built woman. A blade went in near Spider’s left shoulder, as Spider spun and turned away. Not a deep wound, though the knife had ripped his muscles on the way out. Pain a hell of a lot of pain, but Spider was good at handling it.

Not an expert or anything, but he’d learned from experience. Spider had been shot twice and cut more often than he liked to think about. People watch TV and see people shot; stabbed, even run down by a truck....Up they get though and start fighting back. All nonsense of course, all a heap of bollocks as Spider called it. Wounds are painful, really painful. Gunshot wounds hurt like fuck, like the worst toothache multiplied by a few dozen. Sometimes, a gnarly knife wound, could be just as bad. In the real non-TV show world, Spider should have been screaming and unable to defend himself. Spider wasn’t like most people.

“Bastard.” Spider yelled.

A man, definitely a male face in the small amount of light coming through the kitchen window. The guy was trying to swing the blade again, until Spider used a knuckle on the back of his hand. That could be painful, the man dropped his blade. After that it was really all over. An edge of his hand across the guy’s throat, before a really hard punch to his nose. Still muttering something, his opponent had bloody snot coming out of his nose, but he wasn’t out of the fight. Spider took his lock knife out of a pocket and sliced open the man’s cheek. Oh, how he yelled.

“That is pain.....Are you going to behave now ?” Asked Spider.

“Yes....Don’t stab me again.”

What a baby, Spider almost felt embarrassed for the guy.

“Are you Liam ?” He asked.

“Yes.” Just recognisable through all the snot.

Lily chose that moment to finally find out what the hell had been happening in the kitchen. So much for MI6 training, though Spider never had thought their people were that good.

“This.....Is Liam.” Said Spider.

He bashed Liam’s head against the cast iron cooker, twice. Liam was alive, but he’d be unconscious for a while.

“Why did you do that ?” Asked Lily.

Tempting to ask what she had learned during all those tough guy classes, but he didn’t.

“To make him easier to handle.” Said Spider. “We need to bind and gag him, so we can get him in the car. Do you have any duct tape on you ?”

“Of course I do....What car ?” Asked Lily.

“The one I’m about to steal.”

He helped her bind and gag Liam, who remained as limp as a rag doll. He then handed her his lock knife, which still had blood down the edge of the blade.

“I shouldn’t be long.” Said Spider. “If he tries to break free, prod him with this.....Just a little bit.”

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