

Ruby

Chapter 4 – Honey not Vinegar

“They do say Lauren Bacall had to be smuggled out this way to avoid the press, but that was a long time ago.”

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Ruby liked hotel living. The freshly made bed every day, the clean towels, the mini bar that was restocked as if by magic. She'd stayed at the hotel before, it was owned by Malou, a lady who treated George as though he was some kind of messiah. Eventually they'd probably run out of people George knew, but Ruby liked the old wood panelled rooms and the old world shabby chic of the hotel. Malou had once taken her to the roof to show her the view of the Eiffel Tower.

“There, lean to your left and look over the chimney.” Malou had instructed.

Sure enough, Ruby had just made out the top fifty feet of the famous tower. Ruby had just paid for two rooms, she knew Spider and Sarah would be co-habiting, at least until the inevitable rows started. She'd left her room door open while she unpacked and Sarah wandered in and sat on her bed.

“I don't want him to take it for granted.” She said.

“You have money,” said Ruby, “if you don't want to sleep with Spider, get another room.”

“It's not that I mind, but you should have asked me.”

Ruby knew she was right, she was probably punishing Sarah for sending Spider to beat up Dean. Any involvement with the police could complicate her life, to put it mildly.

“Ok, we're only in Paris for a couple of night, maybe just one. In future I'll get three rooms and you can decide if Spider joins you.”

Sarah went to the mini bar and took out two bottles of Beck's. It was early in the day, but Ruby joined her in toasting their arrival in Paris.

“Where is Spider, is he still unpacking ?” Asked Ruby.

“No, he's gone out shopping. Said he had a few things to buy before we saw your contact. I think he's also worried about what fantasies you might have been pulling out of his head.”

Spider had never worried Ruby with his thoughts about her. They were fairly basic ideas of Ruby on her back with her legs wrapped around his back.

“Come on, I'll show you the famous view of the tower.”

Ruby took her up several flights of luxuriously carpeted stairs and then through a door marked as staff only. Now the stairs were narrow and covered in worn linoleum.

“It's not as if he speaks French,” said Sarah, “perhaps I should have gone with him.”

“Spider has a knack on letting people know what he wants.”

They went past the staff rooms, the sound of a couple having sex coming from one door. In another room a transistor radio was playing the local Jazz FM station known simply as TSF. No one challenged them and they climbed a steep set of stairs and were on the wide flat roof.

“It's better in summer,” said Ruby, “the staff come up here to eat and share gossip.”

She made Sarah lean out over the street to see the view of the tower.

“Paris is so beautiful from up here. We can see everything.” Said Sarah.

“All the narrow streets that jam up with traffic.” Said Ruby.

By the time they returned to her room Spider was sat in a chair and finishing off their beer. He was dressed in a new full length leather coat and boots.

"You look very Parisienne." Said Sarah.

Spider stood and gave them a quick twirl, he was obviously very pleased with his new big swirly coat.

"A lot cheaper than in London." He said.

His hand went into an inside pocket and he was holding a large automatic pistol.

"Where did you get that ?" Asked Ruby.

He laughed and threw it to her. It was just a plastic toy, but it looked like the real thing.

"A few Euros in a toy store. Just in case this Henri character gets any ideas." Said Spider.

It had never occurred to Ruby that Henri Gervex might pose a threat and of course it should have.

She handed the plastic gun back to Spider, amazed at how real it looked once it was in his hand.

"I'm glad I brought you along Spider, but I don't think Henri will be a danger to us. Getting him to talk at all might be a problem."

"Can't you just..... you know..... read his mind ?" Asked Sarah.

"The thought needs to be there. I explained all this on the train."

It was no use getting grumpy with them, they both looked at her a bit oddly. One day they'd understand her gift, but they hadn't quite grasped how her gift worked yet. Come to that Ruby didn't understand it properly either.

"I can always put a bit of pressure on him Ruby." Said Spider.

"We don't threaten Henri, he's an official of the DGSE, the French CIA, but they play even dirtier. We treat him with respect and I try to pull what I need out of his head without him even knowing."

"Besides," she added, "you catch more flies with honey than vinegar."

"If he's a spy, will he even be in Paris ?" Asked Spider.

It often seemed that her friends had far more street smarts than her, but sometimes Ruby got a glimpse of how naïve their view of the world could be.

"He's not that kind of spy, he works in an office from 9 to 5. We'll go to his house tonight."

~ ~

The house was way out in the suburbs, the taxi fare was enough to make even the Algerian cab driver smile. He'd liked Ruby, everyone liked Ruby. He'd rubbed his fingers together in the way universally accepted as meaning lots of money.

"Good area your friend lives in. Houses here cost more than I'll make in a lifetime."

"Be back here in one hour, there will be another large tip for you."

He'd be back and not just for the money. He dropped them outside the gates to the drive and they could have been in the expensive part of any European city. The house faced onto the drive rather than the street, so its full beauty couldn't be seen from the road.

"How important is this guy ?" Asked Sarah.

"He runs a department specialising in East European gangs."

The front of the house screamed French architecture, but it was hard to pinpoint exactly why. Ruby pressed the large brass button and almost expected a uniformed footman to answer the door.

Instead a bald man in his fifties opened the door and looked them up and down.

"You are Henri Gervex ?" Said Ruby.

"Yes young lady. What can I do for you ?"

For some reason Ruby lowered her voice to little above a whisper.

"George sent you a request for information on someone in the East, someone called Kurt. I am here to receive that information."

She felt immense anger in him, it was what she'd expected. On the surface though he was still polite.

"You must be Ruby. Please come in, the weather is cold, but then winters in Paris are always cold."

The house was dark and uninviting, she knew Henri lived alone. His wife had left him to live with her yoga instructor and there had been the death of his youngest daughter. A burglar in the early hours of the morning, a burglar who the eldest daughter had seen and tried to fight off. All to no avail though, the youngest daughter had been bludgeoned and died in hospital a few days later. Ruby knew the true cause of his daughter's death, as did George. It had been his leverage for information from Henri for several years; it was his way into the DGSE database.

"Please sit where you like."

The room was pleasant; a TV was quietly showing a news channel that was broadcasting the day's events in France. There were numerous comfortable chairs around a low tiled coffee table. Ruby sat herself next to Henri. There was no offer of drinks; Ruby knew he wanted them to leave quickly.

"I am not here representing George," said Ruby, "I am here because I need to find Kurt because of something he did to me, personally."

Henri nodded at her and took a picture from a buff coloured file on the table.

"Is this your Kurt?"

It was a grainy picture taken with a telephoto lens. Someone had written Budapest and a date on it and it was him, it was her Kurt.

"This is him, do you have a second name for him?"

"I'm afraid not. He was photographed as part of routine surveillance of a terrorist suspect."

He was lying but it didn't matter. Ruby picked a name from his mind, Kurt Trifonov and it appeared he was born on the Bulgarian black sea coast. Other names and faces were associated with Kurt, two women and another man. Ruby memorised it all, names, places, known accomplices. Years of experience with George had given her the ability to remember huge amounts of data, as long as it was only for a few hours. Once back at the hotel she'd write it all out longhand. Ruby put her hand on Henri's and made a point of looking at the buff file.

"You know nothing else, there's nothing in that file?" She asked.

"No, just a few other picture with no names. Nothing of use."

It was a lie again, she knew the file contained everything she'd just pulled out of his mind.

"I'm sorry," she said, "George should never have blackmailed you. I may only be young, but I can understand your grief. I have lost people close to me in tragic circumstances. To lose one daughter at the hand of another....."

"Shut up ! Shut up !.....Here take the damn thing !"

He threw the file at her; about six pages of A4 paper flew out and landed on the floor at her feet.

Spider was on his feet and reaching for the toy gun, but she waved him back into his chair. Ruby slowly put the papers back in the file, making a point of not reading them. She placed the file back in front of Henri and once again put her hand on his.

"I was telling you the truth," she said, "George was wrong to use the information. I need your help, but I want you to help me voluntarily."

He was crying now, a bald middle aged guy crying over something he'd hidden from the world. No one knew, so no one could offer sympathy or advice. Ruby was probably the only person who'd shown him kindness in quite some time.

"Was I wrong Ruby ? One daughter dead and all over a man not worthy of either of them. Was it wrong to help Monique cover it up?"

"No," said Ruby, "you'd have just lost two daughters instead of one."

He handed her the file and it contained the hard copy for what she already knew. Some hand written additions to one piece of paper said Kurt had been seen in Varna.

"May I keep this ?" She asked.

"Yes, but please don't call on me again."

Ruby gave him one of her special smiles. External validation, idolatry, trust, all wrapped up in a smile from a beautiful girl. She'd meant it to cheer him up and ease her own guilt about reminding him of something he'd worked so hard to forget.

"I won't. We'll go to Budapest and then probably Varna on the black sea coast."

There was something in his mind now. He was trying to stop thinking about a filing cabinet in his office. Not because he thought she could see into his mind, but because the contents terrified him. The DGSE had a file that they hid from the rest of the world, a whole cabinet of files that no one outside of a few top people were allowed to see. Ruby picked up a name, or a description in German that was now filling Henri's mind.

"Henri, what can you tell me about Das Geheimnis ?"

His mind did a flip and so did hers. Memories filled his head, memories of pictures of horrific crime scenes. Whole rooms full of dead bodies, killed in ways no forensic science could explain. He wasn't just scared, he was terrified and then he had her by the throat and was trying to drag her out of his house.

"It was only a love tap Ruby, he'll be fine."

Spider had hit him and they were all out of the house, her still holding the file.

"What was all that stuff he was shouting about, Der Gremlins or something ?" Asked Sarah.

"Probably nothing, he's still not right after the death of his daughter." Said Ruby.

She put her fingers to her throat and there were bloody marks where Henri had nearly throttled her. Once again she was glad of her decision to bring Spider along. Henri may have been past his prime, but he was still a very strong man.

"Was the file worth it ?" Asked Spider.

"Yes, we now know a few names in Budapest and an address."

It was ten minutes before the taxi returned for them, ten minutes for Ruby to think about Das Geheimnis, and what the hell she was getting herself into.

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Malou was behind the desk at the hotel when they returned. The small and rather elderly lady had given up her life in the Paris underworld to run a hotel, but she still had her contacts. She asked Ruby for a private chat, while Spider and Sarah headed upstairs to their room.

"I don't want to know your business Ruby, but someone is interested in you and your friends."

"Has someone been asking about us Malou ?"

Her hair was grey now, but her eyes still sparkled with intellect. Malou bobbed her head in the direction of the street.

"No, they're good these ones. About six of them, they keep walking through the street, watching the hotel without appearing to watch."

"They're probably George's people."

"No, I know his people. They're not police either, you need to be careful Ruby."

"I will Malou, thank you."

Ruby went upstairs to tell the others, but their room had a do not disturb sign on the handle and the sounds of sex coming through the door. She went to her own room and ordered a steak and green salad from room service. It would have been nice to have gone out for dinner, but Ruby used the time to go through the file and add notes about what she'd pulled from the mind of Henri Gervex.

"Dinning alone Miss Ruby ?"

“Yes, I have things to do. Thank you Raoul.”

She tipped the waiter and her steak was perfect. Then back to the file and she was amazed how much she managed to remember and add to the pages of grubby A4 paper. Another address in Varna and the face of a blonde girl called Kallina, who may have been the girl with Kurt in London. The remains of her salad were limp and unappetizing by the time she'd finished and locked the file away in her case. It was after midnight, but Ruby wasn't sleepy, too many of the nightmare images she'd pulled from Henri still filled her head.

“Please let them be gone in the morning.” She muttered.

Ruby took a bottle of beer from the minibar and headed up the stairs and onto the roof. No guests were officially allowed on the roof, but Ruby was a personal friend of the owners and considered herself above such petty rules. As far as she knew they hadn't even been entered in the hotel register, but Malou had accepted her payment in cash for a night's stay.

In the summer the roof had been a favourite hangout for off duty staff, but the night was cold and Ruby had the wonderful view of Paris to herself. She sipped her beer and sat on the low wall, looking down on the streets far below. Ruby drifted off into her thoughts and nearly missed the footsteps as someone else climbed up the stairs to the roof. She automatically felt for their mind, expecting it to be Spider, or Raoul, coming to see if she wanted company. Instead Ruby found the mind of Henri and it was full of hatred. Fear too, fear of her !

“Why do you fear me Henri ?” She asked without turning.

Ruby turned to face him and Henri was holding a knife. Nothing that looked military, but a large kitchen knife with a wooden handle. She watched the lights from the street sparkle in the stainless steel blade and felt the madness in his mind.

“You have to go,” said Henri, “all of you. You all have to die !”

His mind was full of memories of death, strange unnatural death. Fear now was driving him, fear of Ruby. She gave him everything she could put into one smile. Love, affection, complete trust and for a second his face softened. But then the madness returned to his mind and he was coming towards her, the knife raised to strike.

“Get out of my mind,” he screamed, “thing of evil !”

He stabbed at her and Ruby was gone, moved to her right at a speed too fast to follow. She'd never moved like that before, but she hadn't been in that kind of situation before. Henri Gervex moved forward with the force of the blow and vanished over the wall. Ruby didn't need to look into the street, the awful sound of a body hitting the ground told her what had become of the DGSE officer. Then the screaming started from below and Ruby realised she needed to get off the roof and back to her room. She hurt that was the problem. It felt like her muscles had been pulled too hard, but all over her body. She looked at her arm and there was bruising, bruising that was slowly covering most of her arm. Her ribs ached, her hips ached and Ruby suddenly knew she was in trouble. She limped over to the stairs and luckily a maid was coming out of her room.

“Get Malou, please hurry.”

She fell onto the floor and pulled her skirt up. There were massive bruises on her legs where her body had moved too fast for her muscles to handle. How was that even possible ? It may have saved her life, but this new facet of her gift was likely to put her in a wheelchair. It seemed to take ages for Malou to arrive.

“What have you done to yourself child ?”

“I'll be fine. I just need to get to my room.”

“A commotion right outside the hotel and now this !”

Malou and the maid helped her down the stairs and although every step was agony, it did seem to get her joints moving again. They put her in a chair in her room, while Malou constantly chattered about the dead man in the street.

“Can you get my friends please ?”

“Yes of course. You just rest.”

“...and Malou.....”

“Yes ?”

“Are we in the hotel’s register ?”

“No, you’re my personal guests.”

Ruby trusted Malou, she always had done.

“If the police call on you, about the incident outside. It would be best not to mention us being here.”

Malou pushed another cushion under her hip and kissed her on the forehead.

“Do you need help from my people ?”

“No, we’ll be leaving tomorrow.”

There was the muffled sound of Malou banging on a nearby door and then Sarah was with her, dressed only in a bathrobe and then Spider came in looking worried. Spider had given up on even finding a robe that fitted him and had a quilt wrapped around him.

“Ruby ! Your legs !” Said Sarah.

Her legs were now a livid shade of red and her knees were swelling up.

“I’ll be fine. Don’t ask me how I know, I just do. A few days and I’ll be fine. But we need to leave for Budapest in the morning.”

The pain was bad now, with peaks that almost had her screaming. It was so tempting to ask Spider to get her some painkillers, but they’d make her drowsy. Ruby needed to be alert to organise the day ahead.

“Did you get a driving licence to go with your Canadian passport Spider ?” She asked.

“Yes.”

“You need to hire a car in the morning. Nothing flashy, but big enough so that I can lie down in the back. Haggle with them for a decent long term hire rate, they expect it. Nothing gets them more suspicious than someone who pays full price.”

Spider was grinning at her now.

“More Jurgis wisdom ?”

“Yes, he was one of the best..... until he was killed.”

Sarah looked a little drunk, but Ruby was pleased that she didn’t seem to have emptied the entire minibar in her room.

“And you Sarah. You need to buy winter clothing in the morning, it’s cold where we’re going.”

“Why the urgency ?” Spider asked.

“Henri was here.”

She let them digest that for a second.

“For some reason he came to kill me, even brought a large kitchen knife to do the job. Luckily it’s his body in the street outside and not mine.”

Sarah immediately hugged her, making her cry out in pain.

“Don’t hug me Sarah, it hurts.”

“Did he hurt you ?”

“No. I moved to get away from him. I moved far too quickly and I’m not sure how I did it. It feels like my bones moved too fast for the rest of me, or something like that.”

They were both giving her the same look they'd given her when they realised she could really look into their minds.

"Why did he try to kill you ?" Asked Spider.

"He hated me for some reason and there was fear in his mind. He thought I was one of these people he's been investigating."

"Are you one of them ?" Asked Sarah.

Ruby remembered the thoughts in Henri's mind, he was certain she was. But the other images, the people turned inside out, the mass graves ! Could she really be that kind of monster ?

"Das Geheimnis he called them. He believed I was one of them and I might be. There is only one way to find out. We have to find Kurt."

Sarah made her comfortable and left her with an open bottle of wine and a packet of Feminax for the pain.

"The only pain killers I have Ruby, sorry."

Ruby watched out of the window until about 3am, when Malou came to tell her the police had been and left again. It appeared the man was thought to have fallen from the roof of a building a little further up the street. At about 4am the pills and wine enabled her to get a few hours sleep.

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"They do say Lauren Bacall had to be smuggled out this way to avoid the press, but that was a long time ago." Said Malou.

It had probably been a long time since any celebrity had used the back entrance, it was now left for the deliveries by the various food suppliers and the laundry. Spider reversed the large Volvo estate between the gates and Sarah helped Ruby into the back.

"It looks like a wardrobe on wheels, but it's comfortable and has plenty of power." Said Spider.

Malou gave Ruby a kiss and then closed the car door.

"Take it easy until we're on the main A4 and heading east." She told Spider.

"No problem, though I haven't got the SatNav to speak English yet."

The brightly coloured screen on the dashboard was giving Spider the route, but the voice was still that of a young woman talking perfect French.

"I can translate any awkward bits." Said Sarah.

Sarah sat in the front with Spider, which gave Ruby space to get comfortable, but it gave them more opportunities to bicker.

"How far to Budapest ?" Asked Sarah.

Spider looked at the screen and pressed a couple of button on the side.

"About 1,500 Kilometres, we can be there in a day if we get a move on."

The lady with the perfect French voice confirmed the distance and told them fifteen hours was required for the journey.

"We'll take two days over it and find a Hotel in Germany," said Ruby, "that will give me a chance to heal up."

"Are we ever going to fly anywhere ?" Moaned Sarah.

"Everyone watches flight passenger lists," said Spider, "it makes sense to drive."

"Urrggh it's just so....." Said Sarah before crashing back into her seat.

Ruby ignored her and took another couple of Feminax, it was going to be a long two days.

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The French police identified the dead man as a civil servant named Henri Gervex. It seemed a fairly obvious suicide, though no one could work out why he'd been holding a carving knife. His name had

appeared on the police logs for over an hour before the DGSE pulled the records and told the local police to forget all about it. In that hour though, a lot of people noticed the log entries.

"I'm sorry George. I sent my best people, yet that fool still managed to get close enough to damage the consignment."

George was in his office in London and the number coming up on his mobile phone gave him no clue as to where Max might be.

"Are you certain he was trying to damage the goods?" Asked George.

"Yes, the package was showing signs of damage this morning. We should meet to discuss this."

"I agree, where are you?"

"Under the bridge."

"Stay there."

George Polandrous hung up and almost called Carlos to send him in search of Ruby, but Max's people might see him as a threat. George knew how powerful a simple smile from Ruby could be, she might well turn Carlos into a real threat. No, Carlos was his last card in the deck, if all else failed. George told Penny, his PA, no one wanted to be called a secretary any more, that he'd be out for an hour or so. He pressed the lift button and waited for one of the four lifts to decide to actually answer the button. Everything and everyone seemed to be disappointing him lately, which worried George. He knew that was symptomatic of an approaching breakdown. There was Malou, good old dependable Malou. She'd called him as he was having breakfast;

"The package is damaged but not seriously. It is on its way east."

Why couldn't everyone be that succinct and efficient? He had known Max for years though, if Max wanted an instant meeting, then he must have a damn good reason. Under the bridge wasn't really code, it was the name of a seedy café only five minutes from his office. He hadn't bothered with a coat, so by the time he got to the café he was glad to step into the warm steamy interior. Max was sitting in a side booth, his stiff leg protruding into the room.

"They do a good old fashioned milky coffee." Said Max.

"That's good. Ordering coffee in Starbucks is like learning a foreign language. I get Penny to go out for it."

The waitress was a glum looking girl with a web tattooed on her hand. She took his order and returned with a surprisingly good coffee and a plate of biscuits. Max gave the waitress plenty of time to get back to her counter before talking.

"Henri Gervex definitely tried to kill Ruby. I'm sorry he should never have been allowed to get that close to her."

"But she was well enough to travel?"

"Yes. My people are keeping a distance, as you asked. But Ruby got into the car they're using, though she seems to be in pain."

"It's important to keep a distance, she's far better at spotting people following her than most twenty two year old girls."

George dreaded to think what Ruby might do if she picked up the thoughts of anyone sent to follow her. She might drop off the radar completely and then she'd be relying on Spider for protection.

"Do you know where they are now?" He asked.

"Yes, one of my team got a tracker onto their Volvo when they stopped for fuel. They're heading east and should stop for the night somewhere near Strasbourg."

"Do you need extra resources? Perhaps a helicopter might help?"

Max was giving him an odd look.

“We aren’t allowed to keep close to her, but now you want the expense of a helicopter to watch her. The police only spend this much on surveillance for cartel bosses and terrorists.”

“She’s very important to me.”

Max shifted his leg about and called over the waitress to get another coffee.

“I know, you told me. Ruby is like a daughter to you. A helicopter and a pilot who’ll keep his mouth shut will double the cost of the operation. It’s your money though, if you want I can get a helicopter.”

“Will it help you keep her in sight.”

“Oh yes, it’ll help a lot.”

“Then get it.”

They sipped their coffee and watched the waitress serve a sandwich to a little old lady who’d come in out of the cold.

“You know I never ask questions.” Said Max.

“I know, but you’re wondering why I’m ready to spend so much to keep one young woman safe.”

“Is she that important George ?”

“Yes she is. Do you know why Henri tried to hurt her ?”

“No, the guy has always been brilliant, but very odd. His own people called him Fox Mulder behind his back. He ran an outfit that looked into strange unsolved cases. His wife left him, one daughter dies, the other runs off with some sort of hippie. He was a ticking time bomb.”

George had his own idea about what may have made the bomb detonate.

“Nothing specific though, about why he wanted to kill Ruby ?”

“He was a crazy guy George. Though funnily enough his department has been getting more money since an incident in the south of France.”

“What sort of incident ?”

“A lot of people died in a small village. The locals talked about strangers with super powers. No one took it seriously, but Henri and his team were in the village for weeks.”

Max banged his hand on the table and laughed.

“The crazy guy probably thought Ruby was a fucking alien !”

George laughed too, but was beginning to wonder if one helicopter was enough.

~ ~

“Where are we ?” Ruby asked.

Spider fiddled with the SatNav and Sarah pulled up an app on her smartphone.

“We’re past Strasbourg and quite near Bühl.” Said Spider.

“Ditto.” Said Sarah.

They were in the car park of a hotel that was off the beaten track, but Ruby had been having feelings about being followed all day. A dark coloured Land Rover had been on the road behind them and now it was stopped on the road, a blonde girl leaning on the bonnet.

“We’ve been doing that a lot.” Said Ruby.

“Doing what ?” Asked Sarah.

“Using devices that tell everyone where we are.”

A day or two before they’d have looked at her as though she was mad, but now Sarah turned off her phone and Spider was giving the SatNav a concerned look.

“There was no reason to think anyone was following us,” said Ruby, “but I’ve been feeling something since we left Paris. I feel hunted ! It might be George, but I think someone is tracking us.”

Spider looked in the direction of the Land Rover and Ruby just nodded at him.

"I'll get us checked in. I still need an arm to lean on Spider."

Her knees ached and her ankles, but the pain had gone. The receptionist saw the pretty girl limping into the hotel and she came over to help. Ruby had that gift, everyone wanted to help her. In truth Ruby paid, but it was Sarah who booked them in. Ruby had a little German, but Sarah had a knack with languages. She could speak more languages than anyone Ruby knew, which was why Ruby thought she was worth the food and board and seventy five thousand pounds. Sarah knew local sayings, swear words in common use and crude comments in the vernacular. In other words, she spoke like a native in most European countries.

"It's only American I have trouble with." Sarah often joked.

They were given three spacious rooms on the ground floor.

"For the pretty injured lady with the sad eyes." The receptionist had told Sarah.

They all went into Ruby's room, a briefing of some kind seemed likely.

"If they're tracking us they probably put something on the car. Have a look for it Spider. They won't have had long to fix it in place, so look for something magnetic."

Ruby unpacked just enough for one night and Spider was quickly back with a plastic device in his hand.

"It was under the rear of the car, I nearly missed it. Do you want me to destroy it?"

"No, later you can put it back."

Ruby had been thinking all day about how to deal with the problem and she'd decided they needed to see Olga.

"Are we going to let them follow us?" Asked Sarah.

"We're going to let them think we're unaware they're out there. We put the device back, we keep using our phones, we even use the SatNav. We drive at a nice steady pace, we ignore any signs that we've noticed the blonde in the dark Land Rover. Then when we get to Budapest we vanish."

Spider wasn't waiting until later. He juggled the device in his hand and then he went back out to the car.

"It's back where it was. Now Ruby, how do we do this vanishing?"

"The Budapest area is home to over three million people, vanishing will be easy. We're travelling light, so we dump the car in the outskirts and get a ride into town. We all take the batteries out of our phones and never use them again until we're back home."

Sarah was fidgeting and looking perturbed.

"I need my phone Ruby, this guy said he'd call. Theo, I met him at the Indian takeaway."

Ruby sighed.

"You take your battery out, or I will. There will always be another Theo."

"Probably several." Added Spider.

Sarah blushed, but she joined in the laughing and promised to take her beloved phone apart when they reached Budapest.

"I suppose you'll now tell us how we get this ride into town?" Asked Spider.

"Later tonight I'll ask the pretty receptionist to use their office phone, I think she'll agree. I'll call a lady called Olga, who used to work for Jurgis."

"I take it she's still in that line of work?" Asked Sarah.

"Olga can get us anything we need. Cars, weapons, replacement phones. Anything, it's what she's famous for."

Spider was still looking out of the window, as if scanning for whoever was tracking them.

"Can we trust this Olga?"

“Oh yes. You guys are going to love Olga. Jurgis used to call her his personal Valkyrie.”

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