

## Ruby V : Machu Picchu

### Chapter 2 – Be Who We Are

**“Sophie wanted a good walk and she firmly believed that in any large city; walk far enough in a straight line and you’ll find a store selling what you’re looking for. It helped that what she wanted to buy was a fairly vague mental list, that she was happy to alter.”**

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Sophie had been surprised how short Ruby’s ‘welcome to the holiday,’ talk had been. There was never going to be anything rousing, it was supposed to be all about enjoying a long vacation. No Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup> style speech about having the body of a weak and feeble woman; but having the heart and stomach of a king. Ruby had never really been one for those kinds of things. There was one item though, that had left Spider a little less than happy. Sophie had looked for Ruby after breakfast, finding her in the garden at the rear of Alessia House. No preamble, Sophie had never been into pointless small talk.

“Did you mean it ?” Sophie asked. “Spider wasn’t happy. How does Todd feel about it ?”

“Ahh, the ban on weapons, I saw Spider look surprised.” Said Ruby. “We’re on vacation, Sophie. Todd understands that and he agrees with me. Do you think British soldiers take an assault rifle on holiday, with their sunblock and beachwear ?”

“But we are investigating a terrorist organisation.” Said Sophie. “They’ll be armed and most of our group don’t have any special gifts. Spider isn’t happy.....He’s not happy at all.”

For a moment Ruby’s face changed and Sophie thought she was in for the long version of we’re not a democracy. Instead, Ruby hugged her and kissed the top of her head.

“Oh, my dear Sophie....Stop fighting other people’s battles. If Spider has a problem, tell him to see me about it. I don’t have the connections here that I have in London. No weapons, nothing likely to annoy the local authorities. Besides, it’s time for us to be what we are and who we are. I can’t wander the world taking the path less travelled, forever.”

“So.....We travel in a minibus and act like tourists ?” Asked Sophie.

“Not act like, we are tourists.”

Sophie had something to ask, that would normally cause friction. There was a hope that throwing it into the ring at the end of the conversation, might save them arguing over it. Sometimes that worked, but not all the time.

“Can I opt out of this morning’s activity ?” Asked Sophie. “I’ll be back in time for the National Museum of archaeology and history, this afternoon. I need to buy a few things and have a look around. I’m looking forward to the museum.”

“Hm.....Fine, but you can take Caleb with you.” Said Ruby.

“I wanted to go alone.....And why him ?”

“Because you have the ability to protect him, Sophie. Out of all of us, he’s the one with enemies looking for him. Take him with you and look after him.....Will you do that ?”

“Of course, I will, Ruby.....Of course I will.”

“Good.....Anyway, his Spanish is probably better than yours.” Said Ruby.

That hurt, mainly because it was probably true. Sophie prided herself on being able to buy wine and junk food, in every major language. Anything more fiddly though, and she was struggling. Sophie found Caleb outside, looking over the minibus with Lily.

"We're leaving in fifteen minutes, Sophie." Said Lily. "First stop will be at Lima Cathedral."

"I've managed to opt out of that." Said Sophie. "I'm going shopping and I was hoping Caleb might like to come with me."

"Yeah, fine." Said Caleb. "I'm not really into old churches."

Easy as that, no arguments, no huge amount of persuasion. It only crossed Sophie's mind later, that Caleb might have thought she was inviting him on a date. He had once called her gorgeous, when she'd worn an expensive evening dress in Budapest.

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Lily Marigold Faria, known to everyone as Lily. A dark-haired woman with looks and skin tone that shouted the Mediterranean, maybe southern Italy. Her great grandparents had come from Sicily, but Lily had been born in Essex. The Marigold middle name was purely an eccentricity of her mother, though Lily had grown to love it.

"Well.....I can see the cathedral, but parking.....I'll take us round the block again." Said Lily.

Lily was driving their minibus; she'd even practised driving a similar vehicle in London. She was up higher than most car drivers and they gave her a wide berth on roundabouts. It wasn't just the size of the vehicle, Lily was sure it was the colour scheme. Yellow with red stripes was similar to the colour of wasps and everyone avoided them.

"There's a car park close by on Jirón Callao." Said Ruby. "If you can't park anywhere on the streets."

"I heard the private car parks charge a fortune." Said Sarah.

Sarah was sat next to her, with everyone else spread out in the back. No one had picked their personal spot yet, but Lily knew they would. It was twelve hundred kilometres to Machu Picchu by road. Half that in a straight line, as the crow flew. But the local roads didn't do straight lines. Strangely by some weird quirk of nature there were no crows in South America, to fly in a straight line. Add on the days on trips around Lima and they were going to clock up a lot of hours in the minibus. Everyone would soon pick their preferred seat and defend it with some aggression, if pushed.

"The view is awesome." Said Todd. "You can see mountains in the distance.....I already don't want to go home."

The cathedral, according to the guide books, was in the baroque, gothic architecture style. It had taken close to two hundred years to build, so there had been a lot of changes and additions. Lily thought the cathedral was striking, but ugly. As it was in the top ten of places photographed by tourists; she was obviously in the minority.

"The kids like our bus, that's the third lot to wave at us." Said Spider.

Spider had been in a mood since breakfast. Ruby had said no guns and Spider had made a huge thing about it. But there he was, waving back at a group of local kids.

"We'll be driving around for hours, Lily." Said Ruby. "I have some local cash.....We'll use the private car park."

Lily knew where it was, they'd driven past their signs twice. It looked a bit narrow, but their minibus wasn't that huge. Once parked up, the attendant wanted the keys. There was a brief argument, but there was no option than to hand them over.

"With so many expensive looking cars, I can't see them taking our bus for a joy ride." Said Ruby.

As they walked out of the car park and crossed the road, there it was in front of them; Lima Metropolitan Cathedral. There was nothing remotely like it in London and there was a square in front of it, with palm trees. It was one of those moments.

"I finally feel I'm on holiday." Said Lily.

"It's a shame Sophie missed seeing it." Said Sarah.

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Sophie wanted a good walk and she firmly believed that in any large city; walk far enough in a straight line and you'll find a store selling what you're looking for. It helped that what she wanted to buy was a fairly vague mental list, that she was happy to alter. There was just one essential.

"I can alter my hair colour; Kallina taught me how. But for something lasting but not permanent, it has to be hair dye." She said.

"What colour are you going to change it to?" Asked Caleb.

"Black, really black.....As black as I can get it."

"Oh, is there any reason why? I like your red hair." Said Caleb.

"I just.....Fancy a change."

The Tottus supermarket was right in front of them, as they turned a corner. A large store on the intersection of three roads, it had to have a decent size cosmetics section. The large green sign looked quite welcoming.

"Oh, I love supermarkets in foreign cities." Said Sophie. "You can grab a basket, pick up what you want, then use plastic to pay for it. Perfect for someone like me, with basic Spanish. I bet you could shop here, without speaking to anyone."

"How much? The bet I mean, how much would you bet?" Asked Caleb.

He'd been attentive, but not too attentive and the comment about liking her red hair had been noted. Sophie was beginning to quite like him. He had a nice shape, masculine without overdoing it. Caleb also had a nice smile; his eyes crinkled at the edges, in an attractive way.

"Twenty dollars." She said. "American dollars."

"Alright....Twenty dollars you can't get out of this store, without speaking to someone."

Sophie stopped in front of the door to the supermarket and grinned at him.

"Fine." She said.

Of course, he asked her a silly question the instant they were inside the store. As if she was going to be that stupid. Sophie prodded him in the chest, hard enough to make him yelp.

"Hey.....Ok, no more tricks." Said Caleb. "You still can't do it though."

Sophie grabbed a basket, the usual green plastic basket that every supermarket on the globe seemed to use. Her mental list of essential items grew, as she noticed the selection of chocolate. Then there were the two aisles of world foods, many her favourites from London. It was amazing how many things she really had to buy, considering she'd hadn't eaten them in years. Sophie almost lost the bet, by asking if there was a decent sized fridge at the house. Of course there was, she'd seen it that morning. By the time Sophie reached the cosmetics section, Caleb was already carrying her overflow basket.

Permanent Hair Dye, Natural-looking, hair colour result, For All Hair Types, Black. It said on the box. She knew what to get, she'd used the same make before. Caleb was pointing at a dark brown dye and making puppy eyes at her, but Sophie really fancied being a full on brunette; at least until it grew out. The girl on the checkout looked sullen, which was wonderful. No attempt to even wish her good day, or thank her for the payment. Sophie used her debit card in the name of Kendra Hunter and left

the Tottus supermarket without saying a word. She waited until they were in a side alley, just in case Caleb claimed the car park was part of the store.

"There.....Not a word, now you owe me twenty bucks." She said.

"You'd never have pulled it off, if the checkout girl had been chatty."

"Excuses, excuses.....Pay up."

They put down the white supermarket bags with the green lettering, while Caleb pulled out his wallet. Two tourists with more money than sense, was how they must have looked to the two street thugs.

"No ones.....You must have a twenty." Said Sophie.

They were laughing and although Sophie prided herself on watching the world around her, she was just thinking about Caleb in a certain way. No decision to share a bed had been made, but a holiday romance wasn't off the table. Of course, she was yet to include him in her private mental conversation. He was a guy though and she was picking up that he liked her.

"Hey !" Yelled Caleb.

One of the street thugs had thumped Caleb, before grabbing his wallet. Not a hard thump, just enough to say back off and be grateful I didn't cut you. The man had a knife in his left hand, quite a long blade. The other thug was a young woman, which Sophie thought had to be rare. There were some areas where aspirational gender equality was wonderful, but not in street crime. The woman was trying to pull Sophie's watch off her wrist. A Rolex knockoff, but it had sentimental value. Sophie pushed the woman away, which caused a torrent of abuse in Spanish. The woman opened a lock knife, with a flick of her wrist, as though it was a flick knife. She nodded at Sophie's fake Rolex.

"Oh no, not for you, honey." Said Sophie.

Sophie wanted to neutralise the two thugs, without inflicting life altering injuries; the phrase the press seemed to be in love with. Dead and maimed thugs caused more police attention than bruised ones. And anyway; Sophie had decided Ruby was right. Being who they were didn't include sending street thugs to the morgue.

"Put a." Yelled the woman, Spanish for whore.

Sophie grabbed the woman and spun her around. Just enough of a force gift then, to send her crashing into the supermarket wall. The woman grunted and fell to the ground, unconscious, but nothing broken apart from her street thug pride.

"Sophie !" Yelled Caleb. "Behind you."

Like a pantomime, he's behind you, but a deadly pantomime. The man was rushing at her, his blade up and ready to strike. Not so gentle this time, she grabbed his arm and twisted. A loud scream as the man dropped the knife, but Sophie wasn't finished. She used her gifts again, force, which was Ruby's current favourite. Sophie lifted him off the ground, until he looked to be hovering, at least twenty feet up in the air. A lot of noise, the street thug was yelling abuse at her. She moved him over the top of an open dumpster and let him fall. A loud crash, but Sophie could feel that he hadn't died. A broken arm maybe, but nothing for the police to get their knickers in a twist about, as Spider said.

"He caught me by surprise." Said Caleb. "Normally.....Most days, I could have taken him."

"I'm sure you could.....Can you see any cameras ?"

It was a grubby alley. But CCTV seemed to be everywhere in modern cities. Sophie looked and Caleb looked and there weren't any obvious cameras. Some were quite small these days, though no one was likely to use high tech cameras to watch a couple of dumpsters. She recovered the man's blade. Another lock knife, which smoothly folded up into her hand. There was something about the knife, a

quality that seemed too good for a street hoodlum. Sophie pushed the knife into her pocket. He was watching her.

"I hope you're not going to grass me up to Ruby?" She asked.

"I never saw a thing." Said Caleb.

They recovered their shopping and began walking back towards the house.

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Spider had heard about Sophie and Caleb's fight over lunch at the house. It had made him even more certain that they really did need a few weapons, even if just for emergencies. He'd looked up Peruvian terrorists on the internet, before leaving London. Ignoring the usual crazy clickbait sites and using just reputable news media, it had still been quite shocking. Digging deeper with the help of Foxy's people, it all went well beyond the Shining Path and Túpac Amaru. For a relatively small country, with half the population of Britain, there had been a lot of terrorist groups. Some just fomenting local tension and violence, but others had hit global targets. It was serious, with organised groups who needed treating as a serious threat. Yet Ruby was treating it all as minor side issue, while they had a nice long break.

".....as if it might mean supper being late." He muttered.

"Why would supper be late?" Asked Sarah.

"Nothing, ignore me."

"Stop being sulky, it'll ruin the day." Said Sarah.

She was right of course, though simply snapping out of it rarely worked. He needed to talk the matter over with Ruby, properly this time. The consensus in the group had changed, after Caleb had told them about the street thugs. Article thirteen in Peru actually permitted the ownership of guns. Not that foreigners using dodgy passports could apply, but Spider saw it as part of his next argument with Ruby.

"Stop fussing, Lily." Said Todd. "I've driven just about everything on active service, including trucks three times the size of our bus."

"I'm not fussing, I never fuss." Snapped Lily. "Ruby did arrange for me to be insured and I doubt if the policy covers other drivers."

It probably did, it was unrealistic for Lily to drive the minibus on every trip. Spider wasn't going to say anything though. Like everyone else, he was enjoying watching Todd and Lily go at it, in a fairly civilised way. Lily was defending her turf and Todd probably just wanted to assert himself a little. Spider thought Lily would win, she seemed to have more stamina. The argument had been going on since they'd left the house, to visit the National Museum of the Archaeology, Anthropology, and History of Peru. Quite a mouthful, so everyone was simply talking about a visit to the history museum. Todd pulled into another lane and was beeped at.

"See.....I should be driving; I've had the training." Said Lily.

"I think they'll be hitting each other within a week." Sarah whispered in his ear.

The museum was located on Plaza Bolívar in the Pueblo Libre district of Lima and the traffic was atrocious. Parking their bus was going to be awkward, so Lily played her ace.

"I know where we can park." Said Lily. "Stop for a moment and let me take the wheel."

"Just tell me where to go, we're surrounded by traffic." Yelled Todd.

That much anger on day one. Sarah was right, there'd probably be blood on the carpet by the end of the week. Ruby had been having a quiet chat with Sophie, but she'd obviously decided it was time to intervene.

“Everyone is insured to drive the bus.” Said Ruby. “Though that should be limited to those with a driving license in their own name. Lily.....Tell Todd where to park, and.....Todd, Let Lily drive us back to the house.”

Things were calm again, though the row had been fun to watch. The parking place wasn't far from the museum, which didn't look that impressive. A solid looking building, that seemed designed more for security than architectural beauty. There were exhibits there on Machu Picchu, which Spider was looking forward to seeing. As they walked through the entrance to the museum, arm in arm, Spider muttered at Sarah in a low voice.

“There'll be more than meets the eye about going to Machu Picchu.”

“Oh yes, there always is with Ruby.”

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As a perfect end to the first day of their vacation. Ruby had promised everyone a meal at the best restaurant in the area.

“On me, I'll be picking up the bill. Eat and drink what you like.” She'd told them. “Apart from Lily of course, who is our designated driver for the evening.”

There was a party mood as everyone left Alessia House, dressed in the best of their casual holiday clothes. A conversation with Caleb had decided her on which restaurant to use, though none of them knew that. Ruby hoped it was an excellent restaurant, the online comments were definitely good. Her reason for choosing it were still speculative and only Caleb knew if it really was the right street, let alone the right place.

“The best place for seafood in Lima, according to TripAdvisor.” Said Todd. “I'm looking forward to this.”

No mention of Lily having to stay sober, while he could drink. Ruby was beginning to realise her lover had feet of clay after all. Strangely she loved him all the more, warts and all.

“Zip me up.” She said. “Be honest.....Is this dress a bit over the top?”

“No, you should see what Sophie is wearing.”

“The Versace evening dress?”

“That's the one.” Said Todd

Sophie had to have her eye on someone, probably Caleb. The dress was so short, that it barely covered Sophie's panties. Ruby had gone for a simple black evening dress and heels. She looked in a full-length mirror and liked what she saw. It could have almost been her at nineteen again, about to make a grand entrance at some kind of social gathering. She'd prided herself on being able to make every man in the room want her. Now she was twenty seven and saw all that as vanity, but it had been incredible fun at the time.

“Thank you.” She said.

“For what?”

“Not joining Spider's gun lobby.”

“You have your reasons and.....I do agree with you.”

Downstairs and Sarah was muttering at Lily, mainly about being told it was a dress casual evening.

“But that is casual to Sophie.” Said Lily.

Sarah then caught sight of her, in her evening dress and Blahniks. Poor Sarah, her face said it all. No one wants to be the one girl in jeans and a jumper, even if both are by a well known designer.

“Sorry.” Said Ruby. “There is time for you to change.....If you want to?”

“No, I'll stay as I am.” Said Sarah. “Just remember that casual, should mean casual.”

“I think you look great, Sarah.” Said Spider.

The guys almost had a uniform, with blazers and trousers. Spider's blazer had a slightly nautical look to it. He could have worn the same clothes to a christening, or an office party. Not for the first time, Ruby thought the gender divide on acceptable clothing, wasn't fair.

"I'm wearing trainers.....Is that alright ?" Asked Caleb.

"They're fine." Said Ruby. "We're on vacation."

Into the minibus and Ruby noticed that favourite spots were already being selected. Just about everyone was sat where they'd been on the way back from the history museum. There were plenty of spare seats, so it wasn't likely to be a problem.

Jose's Restaurant was their destination, though Ruby had no idea if the proprietor was called Jose. In a way, their choice of restaurant was decided by little better than throwing a dart at a map of Lima. The clean and colourful restaurant looked wonderful, far better than the horrors her imagination had been picturing. Everyone looked happy with her choice, as a smiling waiter seated them at their table.

"We all fit around one table.....I like that." Said Sophie.

A large round table, which Ruby had asked for when booking the meal. Sophie was right; after travelling the world with the wunderkinds and assorted military types, it was nice to have a group of just seven. A mystical number, though she'd never intended it that way.

"I haven't heard any news from home in days." Said Spider. "I'm sure London will still be there, when I get back."

"I called Mara last night." Said Ruby. "Everything in Paris is fine, no trouble at the hotel. Charlotte sends her best wishes."

"Imagine Charlie with those thugs." Said Sarah. "She'd have cooked them."

Alcohol had never been a problem on her various trips to the far-flung corners of the globe, though there had been an unwritten rule about not overdoing it. The vacation was different, no getting up at dawn to take a camp apart and travel for miles, no wondering if today was the day someone would take a shot at them. Everyone had drinks with every course of the meal, with brandy to have with the obligatory coffees. Ruby had always liked seafood, since discovering a good seafood restaurant in Beauchamp Place, just behind Harrods. It wasn't to everyone's taste, but everyone seemed to have enjoyed the meal. Or they'd enjoyed a boozy get together, which was fine. Sophie had even kissed Caleb twice in public, which was probably a first, for their resident eccentric introvert.

"Sorry, Sophie." Said Ruby. "I need to borrow Caleb for a moment. I will bring him back though, I promise."

A warm night, they probably looked like tourists wanting to get some air, while taking a look at the street. Vanity, but Ruby had to do it. She opened up her mind to the thoughts of others in the restaurant. Nearly all the men and a few of the women, wanted her, the beautiful dark-haired woman in the evening dress. This time it was fun, though looking into the minds of others could be a double-edged sword. A harmless looking woman, the HR manager for a large bank; had once fantasised about strangling Ruby with her own stockings. No, the thoughts of others weren't guaranteed to be wholesome, or even pleasant. She stopped just outside the restaurant door.

"The building across the street, Caleb." She said. "The one with the green door. Do you recognise it ? Are there any memories of what is beyond that green door ?"

She saw Caleb shudder and knew it was the right place, before he replied.

"That is where I delivered over a dozen packages, Ruby." Said Caleb. "It was where they organised the execution of the politician in Sweden."

“Thank you, we’ll come back for a better look later in the week.”

They might have moved, or even been disbanded. It had been many years since Caleb had opened their packages and learned of their plans. It was worth a look inside the building though, after everyone had sobered up and had a good night’s sleep, or two.

“Can I come ?” Asked Caleb.

“Of course you can.”

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The urn had been placed in a China cabinet in the library. There it nestled, next to a collection of porcelain figures and assorted souvenirs from around the world. That all belonged to the woman who owned the house, but the urn was theirs. A stainless-steel urn with a screw on top, it was designed to travel a long way before being opened. Sophie opened the cabinet and ran her index finger down the urn. It felt cold to her touch.

“I’m sorry, I should have been there.” She muttered.

Caleb was there, fast asleep in a huge old leather armchair. They’d both drunk too much and he didn’t have her ability to sober up quite quickly. Not that Sophie felt totally sober, though she felt sober enough to pick up the urn. In it were the ashes of Baba Yaga, or the ashes of what they’d found of her. Kallina, or Baba Yaga, the name didn’t really matter now. Before going back to London, Ruby was going to take the urn to Machu Picchu. There, right at the highest point in that ancient city, the ashes would be spread over the ground.

“Oh, Caleb....Wake up, I don’t want to be alone right now.” She said.

No use, he’d actually fallen asleep while they’d been making out. Not that Sophie held it against him, there had been a lot of drinking at the restaurant. She’d tease him about it of course, but she still liked the idea of getting to know him better. Which meant she’d probably share a bed with him, at least for a while.

“Are you in there, Baba Yaga ? Is there a tiny part of you still in there ?”

Ruby had insisted that the ashes were to be spread in the Sacred Valley, at a height of over ten thousand feet. It made Sophie think there was a specific reason for going there, beyond simply showing respect for a dead friend. Was Ruby going to bring her back ? Sophie pressed her forehead against the cold metal of the urn.

“Please.....If you’re in there, let me know.”

Nothing, no matter how hard Sophie concentrated. Kallina had gone, her essence had moved on. Ruby had talked to Kurt in dreams, so Sophie hoped Kallina was with him, somewhere. Wherever Baba Yaga’s soul had gone, Sophie accepted that she wasn’t coming back to their world. She almost dropped the urn, but managed to catch it, before it hit the floor.

“Clumsy bitch.” She mumbled at herself.

Still not quite sober, though the urn was unlikely to be damaged by the carpeted library floor. As Sophie reached out to put the ashes back in the cabinet, she felt something. Not a last spark of Kallina, she’d inadvertently turned her mental eye outward, into the surrounding neighbourhood.

“You idiot, Soph....Wake up Caleb and go to bed.” She muttered.

Eugenie had used the method when the hotel had once been under surveillance. She’d sat in a chair next to one of the big windows and observed the street. She’d opened up her mind to the thoughts of every passer-by. According to Eugenie it had been quite enjoyable, most of the time. A few secrets being thought about, the inevitable couple having lustful thoughts about one another. Sometimes the thoughts of strangers could be violent and disturbing, though not as often as Eugenie had anticipated. The trick it seemed, was to listen for attention that seemed too intense, a little



inappropriate, perhaps even thoughts about one of their names. Eugenie had identified the members of a professional surveillance team, in less than a week.

“Sleep for a while longer, Caleb.” She muttered.

Sophie sat on the floor where she was, with her legs crossed. Ruby had told her that opening up her mind to a street full of strangers, had once driven her close to insanity. Eugenie had refined the technique by using a shallow look into many minds. It was night though, when most in that part of Lima, would be asleep. There’d be a lot of dream fragments, but little in the way of organised thoughts. Sophie used a mental lens, to take her mind beyond the garden. Mainly so that she didn’t become swamped by the drunken dreams of those inside the house.

“Oh, so many children.” She mumbled.

Children had strong dreams; their mental footprint greater than dreaming adults. There were dreams of arguments at school, being made to eat food they didn’t like, having a test they’d been dreading. All anxiety dreams and most in Spanish, but the imagery told the story. Sophie couldn’t filter them out, so she ignored anything that seemed to be the dreams of a child, as best she could. Adults were her target, mainly anyone thinking about Alessia House, or one of their names. When Sophie realised her concentration began to feel more like falling asleep, she decided to end the experiment. She gave Caleb a gentle shake.

“Wake up, sleepyhead.” She said. “Whose room do we use, yours or mine?”

That woke him up, at least enough to enable him to talk.

“What?”

“You heard.....Come on, it’s not long until dawn.”

“Your room, Sophie....Mine is a mess.”

So was hers, but she wasn’t ashamed of him seeing it. It happened again, as she was thinking about something else, but part of her mind was looking elsewhere.

‘.....most are from London.....Todd is there.....’

And the thought was gone, with no way to get a range or direction for it. Just knowing they were being observed, was incredibly important. Sophie would tell Ruby about it over breakfast and the news would change things. A guns and weapons kind of change? Sophie doubted it, Ruby seemed determined to keep them unarmed and looking like tourists.

“Are you alright?” Asked Caleb.

“Fine, I felt something, out beyond the garden...Maybe a long way off. We’re being watched, by someone who knows Todd by name.”

“Crap, that’s huge.”

“I know.”

“What do we do?” Asked Caleb.

“In the morning I’ll tell Ruby....For now....It’s sleep or sex, your choice?”

Sophie didn’t need to be a mind reader to know his choice. Guys were wonderfully predictable when it came to that kind of thing.

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Calaso Duale, known as Cal, was a sister of a wunderkind, but not one of them. A sister to Abe, but from their father’s second wife. It was a complicated family with a highly convoluted family tree. But Abshir Duale, Abe, had all the weird mental gifts and Cal had.....Just a lot of street smarts. She couldn’t crush a dumpster with her mind, the way her brother could. Her gift from wherever such things came from, was an IQ off the scale. Abe could crush the dumpster, but she’d know which one

needed crushing and why. London was five hours ahead of Lima, which meant Cal was up, having coffee and listening to the noises outside the kitchen window.

“London is so noisy, Constanze.” She muttered.

Cal wasn't sleeping well, she tended to nap on the sofa in the morning, with Constanze lying across her. Everyone had told her that if you had to get arrested, Sweden was the place to do it. So nice in prison, that people hated to leave. Still, she couldn't help worrying about Abe. Cal left Ruby's cat on the sofa and looked out of the window. She'd had a strange feeling the previous evening, that someone was watching her from the street. Then again, London was noisier than Somalia, with a lot more people wandering the streets at night. Her English was good now, thanks to a lot of help from Ruby and her friend Monique.

“You have my number....Any problems, call me.” Monique had told her.

Her English was good, but her accent still sounded like Africa. Hackney was a melting pot, but even there, not everyone liked foreigners. Cal had convinced herself that the ill will she was feeling, was nothing but old fashioned racism.

“They're a funny lot around here, but Hackney is safer than many seem to think.” Angie had said.

Angie was the woman in the ground floor flat, the lady with an obvious soft spot for Spider. Cal had no idea what Angie did for a living, but she seemed to be around most days. Spider said Angie could talk the hind legs off a donkey, which was just one of his weird sayings. Having Angie around was nice, better than having the building completely to herself. Constanze leapt onto the kitchen unit and began to purr, the instant Cal stroked her.

“I still.....I know someone is watching me, Constanze.”

The cat was old, the fur on her face was going grey. Not that Cal believed she was hundreds of years old; she was just a very old cat. Maybe fifteen years old, tops. Even Constanze seemed to look at a certain spot over the road, though when Cal looked, there was nothing there. Outside the flat was fine, Cal enjoyed mixing in with the crowds to buy her food and the cat's. Crowds were comforting, she could blend into a crowd and become almost invisible. It was only when she was at home, mainly in the evening, that she felt as though she was being watched. Ruby had left her a drawer full of cash, with instructions to call Monique, if it needed to be refilled. As arrangements for such things went, Cal thought it was just about perfect.

“I feel it again, cat.” She said. “I'm definitely going to call Monique later and tell her.”

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