

Ruby 3

Chapter 7 – Baba Yaga

“Throughout the east the children are taught about Baba Yaga. In Serbia they call her Baba Korizma. In Croatia mothers used Baba Roga as a threat to make unruly children behave. The Romanian mothers frightened their badly behaved children with stories of Baba Pehtra.”

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~Then~

Eastern Europe – Five Years Previously

Ruby saw Baba Yaga hovering in the air and drifting towards the two men who she had already robbed of their hands. There was no mercy now, the creature that had been quiet little Kallina, used her own gifts to lift them into the air and begin shredding their flesh. They could scream now, even above the hurricane wind, Ruby could hear the screams. She stopped looking and hung onto Sarah, hoping that none of her friends would be injured in the madness unfolding in Khulo.

It made sense now, the pictures in the DGSE file, the village in France where many of the people living there had been ‘turned inside out,’ as it said in the file. Had that village been the site of another battle between Das Geheimnis and their enemies ?

“No Baba Yaga, please no !”

Ruby looked up and Sarah looked too. The man with the sniper rifle was gone, his body no doubt shredded and scattered into the night. The last man alive from their enemies was still holding onto his Kalashnikov, but he showed no signs of using it. Throughout the east the children are taught about Baba Yaga. In Serbia they call her Baba Korizma. In Croatia mothers used Baba Roga as a threat to make unruly children behave. The Romanian mothers frightened their badly behaved children with stories of Baba Pehtra. Of course once the children grew up they became too sensible to believe such nonsense. The man in front of Baba Yaga was Russian and now he believed, he was once again a frightened child wanting his mother to save him from the wicked old woman of the woods. Baba Yaga showed no mercy, she shredded his flesh and turned his bones to dust, before sending what was left of him far into the woods.

Baba Yaga wasn’t finished; it was as if her rage was still growing. The house went, that too was turned into fragments. Brick, tile, wood, carpets, furniture and the bodies of the dead, all pulverised and sent off by the wind to cover the woods for miles. It stopped as quickly as it had started and dear quiet Kallina was looking at the debris where a large house had once stood. The burning car had set the woods alight and a broken electrical feed had ignited the broken furniture, which had piled up against the garden wall. As usual it was Olga who brought order to the chaos, though she was now limping instead of running.

“We have to go Ruby, someone will have called the emergency services.”

“Quick, before the fire reaches the lane where the cars are.” Said Ruby.

“Where is Carlos ?” Asked Olga.

“He’s dead, killed saving my life.” Said Leo.

Spider helped Olga, who was having real problems with her left knee. Serge set off in front and Ruby put her arm through Kallina’s and led her towards the entrance to the lane.

“I’m not going any further with you Ruby. Get to Baku and remember what Kurt told you, be strong.”

“Will I see you again ?”

“Perhaps, but the children are your responsibility now.”

Kallina was gone, vanished again, leaving Ruby to run after the others. They easily beat the fire to their cars and now they fitted into the vehicles without scrunching up. No one mentioned Carlos, that would come later. They heard the sound of sirens as they turned left into the main road, the fire was spreading north with the prevailing wind. Spider looked over the seat, his hand over the SatNav controls.

“Baku ?” He asked.

Ruby nodded and Spider tapped in their destination. Serge was now driving the BMW estate and Ruby waved to him out of the rear window.

“Eight hundred and seventy kilometres,” said Spider, “two days careful driving.”

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~Now~

Frank Knight wasn't worried about being on the night shift on his own. From ten pm to seven the next morning, Frank made sure nothing untoward happened at the offices of the Polandrous Foundation. At one time he'd sat at the front desk, but now he spent most of the night in the security office on the first floor.

“Built to withstand anything.” George Polandrous had told him. “Anything bad happens, just stay in the security office and call the police. Stay put and you'll be safe Frank.”

It was the public's fault of course, bless em. Frank had quite liked being on the front desk, watching the world go past the glass doors in the middle of the night. Too many drunken idiots banging on the doors though, some demanding to be called cabs to get home. When a screaming drunk had been on the doorstep for an hour one night, George Polandrous had decided to move the night guard to the first floor.

“Out of sight, out of mind.” George had told him.

There were multiple cameras feeding images through to six large screens on the wall in front of him, and even a clever piece of software to warn him about things moving that probably weren't supposed to be moving. Add on the thermal detection and it was how they'd discovered the mouse problem in the staff canteen area. Not that Frank vegetated in front of the screens all night, there were still patrols of the building to be carried out every two hours. As the clock said it was exactly two in the morning, Frank began what had become a rarely changing ritual.

“The card in your pocket will register where you've been.” The tech guy had told him. “You don't even have to swipe it in the elevators. Just don't forget to carry the card everywhere, even to the toilet.”

First Frank looked over the views of empty offices on the screens and the view from outside of the front door. Good, no gang of crooks were lurking, waiting to break into the building. He picked up his own cellphone from the desk, before leaving and locking the security office. For the first part of his rounds he used the stairs to get to the ground floor lobby. He called his wife, knowing she'd be reading in bed, rather than asleep.

“How is she ?” He asked.

Frank wasn't sure if having two grown up daughters was a blessing. They'd been so sensible as kids, right up to the point where puberty seemed to have robbed them of their senses. Jackie wasn't too bad, though she did have her moments. Barbara was the problem, right from discovering boys when she was about thirteen. Barb went from one toxic relationship to the next and now she was pregnant.

“She's still not sure if she wants to keep it.” His wife told him.

Frank was professional, he prided himself on being able to keep his home life from interfering with his job. After the call ended he looked over the lobby, even rattling the front doors to make sure they were secure.

"It's her decision." He muttered.

The elevators next, more specifically the one that went right up to the top floor. From there he'd give every floor a quick walk through, before ending up back in the security office. Done properly it took him about half an hour, or fifteen minutes if his back was playing up and he wanted to get back to his comfy leather chair with the orthopaedic design. His back was a legacy from his days with the police and one too many encounters with undesirables, that had turned into fights.

"Come on, I haven't got all night."

Another part of the ritual was muttering at the elevator, which always seemed to park itself on the top floor. As the doors opened, there came the part that always gave him a bit of a buzz. He pressed the button that only responded to the boss and a few very senior people, and him of course. Frank pressed the button for the top floor, the special button with a red centre and yellow edging. The doors closed and he was on his way.

"Quick run around tonight I think." He muttered, rubbing his lower back.

Again, the pleasure of having the door to George's office open when he pushed it. Occasionally the great man would still be there, usually when the markets were having a bad week. Not tonight though, the office was quiet. Nothing moving, not even a mouse since the infestation had been dealt with. The lighting was low, but he wasn't in danger of bumping into anything, or falling over the furniture.

"That'll do, next floor." He muttered.

Back in the elevator and all seemed well until the doors closed, yet the elevator refused to descend. Frank wasn't even slightly claustrophobic and he had a rather pragmatic view about life. Problems happened, you just had to keep cool and deal with them.

"Damn thing..... Too bloody clever, that's the problem."

He thumped the button a few times and swiped his card, just in case. Still the elevator refused to move. Frank pushed the alarm button and nothing happened, nothing at all. No alarm, no comforting sound of a human voice coming out of the speaker on the wall. Nothing happened on the second time he pushed the button either, or the eighth time.

"Stupid thing."

Frank still wasn't worried, his heart rate barely increased. He'd been a desk sergeant at a busy police station for years; little if anything now scared or surprised him. If he needed to use the toilet he'd create one in a corner and he wasn't going to have to wait that long. When the dayshift arrived at seven, they'd get him out. He pressed the alarm button for what had to be the fifteenth time, before deciding to use his phone. The emergency number was on the wall, in nice large red characters.

"Fuck it."

No signal on his phone, no connection at all. Again he wasn't going to panic. There were a lot of Wi-Fi and other wireless connected devices in the building. There were dead zones for cellphones, everyone knew that. They'd even moved the microwave to the other side of the kitchen, to stop it messing with a few blue tooth devices. There was always the trap door above his head.

"No, I'm not MacGyver."

Twenty years ago maybe, but Frank was no longer built for gymnastics. A few too many chip suppers and then there was his back. There was a fold up seat on the rear wall of the elevator. He pulled it down and made himself as comfortable as the hard wooden seat allowed. His battered old android

phone didn't have many apps, but it did have a snake game he liked. Frank leant back against the elevator wall and concentrated on trying to beat his high score.

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Kallina didn't start to become Baba Yaga as the shotguns fired. She started to change in subtle ways, as she'd felt the presence of four angry men behind the door she was about to open. Not just angry, they were prepared and willing to use extreme violence. Olga had been banging heads together, looking for a name. Maybe not them, but Lacayo's guards were expecting someone to come calling. "Keep behind me." She yelled.

Already her voice was changing, as she surrounded herself with a thick dark mist. Olga knew she was still on their side, but her borrowed henchman might panic. The shotgun pellets did sting and hurt her, they just didn't do enough damage to kill her. At least they wouldn't as long as she took care of the men firing at her fairly quickly.

"Christ ! What is that ?" Someone shouted.

Baba Yaga hoped it was one of the enemy men shouting, though she wasn't sure. Out of the dark mist she emerged, eyes glowing red, long thin fingers crackling with power. She looked like the archetypal evil witch, complete with withered skin that made her look every day of her immense age.

"She's still Kallina, she's still fighting with us." Shouted Olga.

As Baba Yaga she hovered a foot or so above the ground, selecting her first target. The largest was closest to her and he was trying to reload his weapon. He had to be seven feet tall and not all of it was muscle. Three hundred pounds in weight, maybe more. Taking him out of the battle would probably make Olga's guys trust her a bit more.

"You !" She yelled pointing. "Can you fly ?"

Of course he looked confused. It was a weird question, and anyway, she doubted if he'd been hired for his quick wits. Baba Yaga grabbed him by the arm, lifting him up as though he were a tiny child. She threw him at the large windows which covered one entire wall. Glass probably toughened to resist all sorts of accidental damage, maybe even strong enough to resist a hurricane.

"Jeezzzz." Muttered Pablo.

A three hundred pound man though, propelled at speed.... The window shattered with an ear splitting crash. Through the debris of broken glass went the man, quickly accelerating towards the ground below. There was no audible thud as he hit the ground, no screaming people. She did hear the police though, as they battered on the door that would never open.

"No ! Here's my gun....." Shouted one of their enemy's men.

Two of them dropped their weapons, the third still had some fight left in him. As he raised his shotgun to fire at her, Baba Yaga grabbed him and threw him towards the ceiling. A hanging ceiling, he went through the tiles and screamed as he hit the concrete several feet beyond. He was unconscious as he landed on the office floor. Olga beat her to it, saying what Baba Yaga was about to say.

"Get these men duct taped.....Be quick, I hear the police outside."

Olga spoke to her quietly, as Lacayo's men were duct taped at wrists and ankles.

"Can we get out of here ?" Asked Olga. "I really don't fancy our chances if we have to fight the police to get out."

"Don't worry, I can get us all out once we get to Lacayo." Said Baba Yaga. "Just one more room full of guards to deal with, then we'll be in his office. Trust me Olga, I can get us out of here..... Just don't get shot and die..... Alright ?"

"I'll do my best not to."

Baba Yaga didn't open the door to the next room, she simply crashed through it. The door was totally destroyed, along with most of the partition wall. She lost count of the men and women in the room trying to shoot her. Baba Yaga shredded their flesh, with the nails on her fingers. More like talons than nails and sharper than the claws of any tiger. She ripped flesh and tore at sinews, until all the enemies in the room were dead. Messy work, both the room and her were covered in blood. Quick though and efficient, if you didn't mind the sight of bloody, shredded flesh. Even Olga seemed reluctant to talk to her, until the slaughter was over.

"Igor's been shot." Said Olga.

Probably just bad luck, falling into the shit happens category. Igor was lying on the office carpet, a pool of blood beginning to spread out from his left thigh. He was still conscious and lucid, though probably not for long.

"Fuck..... They must have hit an artery." He said. "I don't think I'm getting out of here."

Baba Yaga used her talons to rip open his trousers and the wound looked bad.

"This will hurt.....A lot." She said.

He'd need proper medical attention, she just wanted to stop the bleeding. Cauterisation was the easiest way, she'd done it before. There could be complications from muscles starved of blood, but it was better than dying. No flames, just a heat at the end of her fingers. Igor screamed as she plunged her red hot fingers into his flesh, cauterising, sealing, stopping the dreadful flow of precious blood. Mercifully he passed out while she was still sealing off a small vein that had also been damaged.

"That's the best I can do, someone will need to carry him." She said.

Olga arranged it, giving two of the cartel gunmen the job of making sure Igor wasn't left behind.

Baba Yaga pointed a blood stained talon at the closed door the other side of the blood and carnage.

"Not far now," she said, "he's in there..... KC Lacayo."

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Frank Knight had actually dozed off to sleep. The elevator dropping like a stone woke him up and the jolt as it stopped brought him fully awake and alert. His phone was on the floor and as he picked it up, he noticed there was now a signal. Another jolt, with the elevator moving up a few feet, before coming to a sudden stop.

"Christ ! What the hell is going on with this thing ?" He muttered.

It felt as though he'd been asleep for hours, yet his phone told him it had only been a few minutes. Frank braced himself as the elevator moved up. It carried on moving, even if it was in the wrong direction. Not that he was going to use George's private elevator again until it had been checked out. He'd finish his rounds using the stairs. As he left the elevator on the top floor, he called the emergency engineers.

"Hello..... I'm the night security guy at the Polandrous Foundation. The private elevator for my boss just had a crazy few minutes. Dropped like a stone at one point. Can you get someone out to look at it ?"

The call ended with the promise of an engineer calling sometime before eleven. Frank decided to use the public elevators for his next patrol at four.

"I might even give the top floor a miss." He muttered.

Suddenly stopping buses had been known to jolt his back and cause him pain for days. It looked like the damned elevator had done the same. As he had no intention of using the stairs to get to the top floor, he decided to give it another once over while he was there.

"Hello..... Who's there ? Is that you Mr Polandrous ?"

A few people had mentioned the night time lighting. Probably very energy saving and good for the planet, but it left shadows in corners and some doorways. Frank was certain he'd seen someone move near the door to the stairs, though he was willing to admit it might have been a mixture of nerves, crap lighting and still not being properly awake.

"Idiot..... Seeing things now."

So tempting to take the stairs to the next floor down and use one of the main elevators to get back to coffee and his comfortable chair. His wife liked the idea, but Frank had a morbid fear of being pensioned off before he was ready. His rounds had to be completed. Frank knew something was wrong, when the door to George's office refused to open. He was unflappable, worried about nothing, yet his heart was beating faster.

"Don't be an arse Frank." He muttered. "It'll be an electrical glitch."

There had been glitches before, quite a few just after the new security system had been installed. Frank had a set of keys on his belt and he knew the one with a red blob on it opened George's office. He unlocked the door and peered into the gloom.

"Anyone there?" He called.

His memory wasn't what it was, though he was certain George always cleared everything off his desk before leaving for the night. Frank tried to remember if the file had been next to George's computer, the last time he'd looked.

"The desk was clear..... I'm certain of it."

There was a panic number he could call, just four numbers entered into an app on his phone. They didn't even call to confirm, before half a dozen tough looking guys turned up. Frank had never used the app, but Len had once. George knew people, everyone in the building had picked up on that.

"I wouldn't like to upset the guys who arrived." Len had told him. "It was nice to have them turn up though and know they were on our side."

Frank cringed as his phone glowed, lighting him up for anyone to see. He entered the first three numbers of the panic code he still hoped not to use.

"Come out, I can see you." He yelled.

Bluff of course, though he'd lost count of the number of times it had worked when he was a copper on the beat. Once a huge mountain of a guy had come out from behind a stolen van. That had probably been the night when his back problem had started.

"You can't get out..... Every door is locked."

No sounds, no hint of movement in the shadows. Whoever had opened the file was probably long gone, though they might still be in the building. Frank turned on the desk lamp on George's desk and looked at the open file. He wasn't someone who had a huge degree of natural curiosity, but he'd have to fill out a full report, as he intended to call the police. An intruder, an open file, a shadow near the door to the stairs. Taken all together, it couldn't be ignored.

"They'll do it..... Pension me off if I imagined it all." He muttered.

The file was open at a page of electronic transfers of funds to Nairobi in Kenya. Some quite large sums, sent on behalf of a woman in West Virginia in the USA. Frank didn't touch the file, the intruder might have left fingerprints. His own phone was still waiting for the fourth number on the panic app. Frank picked up George's desk phone, ready to dial three nines.

"I wouldn't do that."

A male voice coming out of the shadows, a voice distorted in some way. When the owner of the voice stepped into the light from the desk lamp, Frank felt scared. It was instinctive, visceral, as though his entire body was getting ready to run.

“Who are you ?” Frank asked.

The intruder was tall, probably six feet seven or eight. He was wearing a dark duffel coat with the hood up. The coat covered most of him, though Frank thought the man might be disabled. He was definitely putting more weight on his left leg. As for the face ? The features, what he could see of them, were wrong in some way. Try as he might he couldn't see enough of the man's face put his finger on why.

“This is nothing to do with you Frank.” Said the man. “Go back to your office, take a nap, forget about what you've seen.”

“There will be something for you.....Money to help with the new baby.”

A woman's voice, again distorted. She was as tall as the man, though she'd chosen a long cape and hood to hide her appearance. Again she favoured her left side. The feeling of instinctive fear turned to a scream, as she pulled her hood back.

“What the hell are you ?” Screamed Frank.

Her blow hit him on the side of his neck, sending him flying over George's desk. He was hurt, badly hurt, the pain in his neck was worse than he'd imagined pain could be. By some weird luck his phone was near to his left hand. He pressed the fourth number and saw a nice comforting message on the screen.

'Help Is On The Way.'

Frank managed to get up on his knees, before her second blow sent him into darkness.

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It must have been a bit daunting for him, knowing they'd already killed or rendered harmless, all of his well trained and ruthless guards. There he was though, looking defiant with a large and probably heavy gun in his hand.

“You must be KC Lacayo.” Said Baba Yaga.

“That's him, I've seen him before.” Said Olga.

Baba Yaga put it down to geography and shared race memories. In Eastern Europe they were brought up knowing about her in fairy tales, the dreadful old witch in the woods. On some deep level they all understood the need to be afraid of her. Lacayo was reputed to be from somewhere in South America. None of his parents or grandparents had heard about her, of been threatened with Baba Yaga if they misbehaved. He was nervous, but not terrified of her.

“Put your gun down, its bullets will just annoy me.” She told him.

She felt the fear in him grow, using her own powers to magnify that fear. Still he wasn't dropping the large automatic. It was time for a little simple magic, the tricks she'd taught the wunderkinds when they'd first been brought to her.

“That gun looks so hot..... Too hot to touch.” She said.

A simple suggestion which she let run through his mind, his own imagination multiplying the effect. He dropped the gun as though it was red hot. She looked at Olga.

“Another to be duct taped.” She said. “Make it quick, the sounds of hammering and bashing have changed. I suspect the cops have realised it might be easier to break through a partition wall.”

Looking into Lacayo's mind told her nothing and that in itself was important. Someone had put blocks into his mind, strong mental walls to hide certain memories. People with that kind of skill were extremely rare, if it was a person ?

“We're leaving.” She shouted. “The cops will be through the wall in a few minutes. Get in a circle around me and touch me, you have to be touching me. Not necessarily my skin Pablo, a good hold on my clothing will do.”

Igor had to be carried and the famous KC Lacayo was being awkward, needing to be dragged. By the time everyone was huddled around her, she could hear the cops running through the offices, shouting warnings at guards who'd already been duct taped. Baba Yaga got her arm around Lacayo's neck and she was ready.

"We're leaving..... Now."

She'd always found moving around the globe easy, shifting herself almost instantaneously from one place to another. Even pulling everyone else with her wasn't tiring. A skill so easy and useful, she often wondered why Ruby and the thirteen found it so difficult. Something had been lost during the creation of the second batch of hybrids. More survived, but some key skills had been either lost or diluted.

"Crap Kallina, it's as hot as hell." Said Olga. "Where have you brought us, a sauna?"

Baba Yaga became pretty blonde Kallina again, though she did keep her choke hold on their prisoner.

"Africa, Kenya to be precise." She answered. "I found Ruby and homed in on her. It seemed sensible as it might take two of us to get anything out of KC's head."

"I didn't sign up for Africa." Said Pablo.

"I can take you home, or anywhere else you might want to go." She said. "It might be sensible to stay here until the heat dies down a bit."

Kallina was impressed when Ruby came through the wall behind them, at the same time as Spider came in through the door. Anna and Doc arrived next, quickly lowering their weapons when they saw it was her.

"Why did you arrive in our spare bedroom with a dozen people Kallina?" Asked Ruby.

She stood up, thrusting KC at Spider, who seemed to get the idea that he needed to be handled roughly and treated as a prisoner.

"This is Lacayo, you want the names in his head." Said Kallina. "It might need two of us to get at his memories, maybe more. Someone has put blocks in his mind."

"The unconscious man is Igor, one of mine." Said Olga. "He needs a doctor if that can be arranged." Ruby looked at Doc, who nodded at her.

"I can arrange that." He said.

"I'm Pablo and when I got up this morning the world seemed to make some sort of sense. Where are we, exactly?"

"A house that's for sale in Marsabit, Kenya." Said Ruby. "We're about five hundred and fifty kilometres north of Nairobi. Anything else you want to know?"

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Penny was the official key holder, though Rory had arrived at his house just as he'd been having toast and coffee. Rory was the leader of the rather intimidating group of men who answered the panic alarm. Most of the staff at the foundation thought they were hired mobsters, which was the effect Rory had aimed for. In truth the men worked for Foxy and all of them were, or had recently been, serving special operations soldiers in the British army. They were rarely called and when they were asked for, they tended to take over.

"I called his wife, but you'll need to talk to her. Frank has vanished and although I'm ninety nine percent certain he's been the victim of something nasty..... You'll need to sound out his wife. Sorry George, not pleasant I know. Did Frank have a younger woman on the side, or a young man? You know the sort of thing..... All done tactfully of course."

Rory had been drinking his coffee and nibbling at his toast as he spoke and George wanted to hit him. He might have done, if he'd been twenty years younger, fitter and a hell of a lot braver.

"Are the police involved?" George had asked.

"Hmmm... We are keeping them informed. Formalities need to be observed and all that."

Damn the man, he even sounded like Foxy. George had been involved in some dangerous activities in the past, usually because of Ruby. A few employees of the Polandrous Foundation had died, usually armed security personnel and usually while serving overseas. No one in the office in London had ever been hurt though, not so much as a scratch. George always considered the staff in London as non-combatants, harmless civilians.

"I can't see Frank raiding the office and then using the panic app." George had said.

"My thoughts too.....Especially once I saw the backup camera footage."

"What did it show?"

Rory had the nerve to eat his last piece of toast before answering.

"Probably best if I show you once we get to the office."

George Polandrous was currently sat in the back of one of Rory's vehicles, a grubby beige four door saloon. They'd been outside the offices of the foundation for a few minutes, while George got his thoughts together. That was something which seemed to take longer with every passing year.

"I always assumed the London staff were immune from it all." He said. "Especially after the security systems were upgraded."

"The systems worked well, it's why we still have CCTV recordings." Said Rory. "No system is a hundred percent though, no matter what the tech guys might say."

George got out of the car and walked up to the front door of the building, his building. It had always seemed so ordinary, almost dull and boring.

"What have you told the staff?" Asked George.

"Very few of them are in yet." Said Rory. "The story will be close to the truth, the best cover stories usually are. Frank Knight has gone missing and we've been called in to help find him."

"Good."

Penny was near the elevators, putting a sign on the door of his private lift to the top floor. It seemed he'd have to walk up the last flight of stairs, as his elevator was out of order. The look on her face made him hug her for a while.

"Oh George.... Frank of all people. He was such a nice man."

"Don't say was Penny. He might turn up."

"You need to see the camera recordings." She said.

There were four of them by the time they entered the spare office next to his, the one usually given to the auditors and other visitors who needed somewhere private to work.

"My guys are still running tests and collecting evidence in your office." Said Rory.

"Literally running a vacuum cleaner over the carpet to see what they can find." Added Graham.

Strangely for someone constantly moaning about techies, Rory seemed to like Graham. George could understand why. Graham was his techie, trained in the army, his skills honed in the various military intelligence departments of Her Majesty's armed forces. Graham was his techie and to someone like Rory, that made a huge difference.

"I've seen this many times this morning." Said Rory. "We'll watch it together with the sound down, then you can watch it as often as you like. Worth noting that without the automatic backup systems, you'd be wondering why one of your security guys hit the panic button and left the building..... All for no good reason."

It was his laptop on the desk and Rory began showing him the events which had caused Frank Knight to use the panic app. It started with Frank hitting the alarm button in the elevator and then sitting down.

"They did something to the elevator, something clever." Said Rory. "So clever that we're still trying to understand how it was done."

The recording carried on, with the elevator bumping about and Frank recovering his phone from the floor.

"I watched the recording of the night before." Said Graham. "He was a creature of habit, always working his way down the building. I think they, whoever they are, expected the elevator to automatically go to the ground floor."

"It doesn't. I'm always moaning about that." Said Penny. "The damn thing parks itself on the top floor."

"Crap..... So Frank might have died because of a glitch ?" Asked George.

"It looks that way." Said Rory. "Now..... Look at what was going on in your office, while Frank was having a nap."

It looked like smudges on the recording, until the smudges began to open drawers and pull files from shelves.

"They're not using clever tech to scramble the cameras." Said Graham. "It's some sort of optical affect that..... It should be impossible."

"In the same way that getting in and out of the building unnoticed is impossible." Added Rory.

"I've seen the next part..... I can't watch it again." Said Penny.

It was Frank, being conscientious when he should have been in the security room with his feet up.

"He's even limping." Said George. "The elevator must have really bounced him about."

George didn't even jump when the smudge on the recording became a man in a dark duffel coat. In a way he'd been expecting it for a very long time. He did jump when the woman revealed her face, though he'd seen that face before. Not her face, but one very similar. He hit the space bar to freeze the playback.

"We have prints of her face George." Said Rory. "The next part is quite violent. You might want to stop there."

"I know what she is." George said. "Penny, please get file Kurt DG 8 out of the secure archive."

He didn't want to watch, but he had to, he owed that much to Frank. The woman who wasn't really a woman hit Frank, sending him crashing over the desk. Not content with that she hit him again while he was still trying to get up. The way Frank's head went right over to one side.....

"He couldn't have survived that." Said Rory. "No one could."

A minute of the camera showing Frank lying on the floor, before the recording stopped.

"I won't bore you with compressed data and encrypted packets." Said Graham. "They wiped all the local recordings and that's all we have. Until the recordings started up again about half an hour later."

Penny returned with an old and grubby file, with writing in the Cyrillic alphabet on the cover. To George getting the file out of storage was a defeat, a sign that he'd been wrong. They weren't all dead after all.

"A Russian army file from when Afghanistan was their problem." He said. "They lost about twenty men and an entire village was destroyed. It was all hushed up of course, the soviets only ever publicised their victories, never defeats. Luckily one of their officers was trying out a new device, a primitive form of body camera. Actually I believe it was fitted into his helmet."

She looked worse than the woman who'd been in his office, more terrifying. There had been full daylight that day, way back in nineteen eighty seven and she hadn't been attempting to hide her features. It was the wild savagery in her eyes that always scared George, every time he'd looked at the picture. Gums pulled back from her teeth, nostrils flaring. That could have all been put down to her being a crazy woman, a feral human. It was the long extended skull that shouted something alien had killed the Russian soldiers. Something that had no place in that quiet Afghan village. Only the cleavage and something about the eyes, marked her as being female.

"She's not human." Said Graham.

"Is that picture genuine?" Asked Rory.

"Oh yes, Kurt spoke to a child who'd survived the event, the only survivor from the village. This is a rogue creature that is part human, though I suspect only a tiny part. The rest of it is something far older and more savage. You're looking at the best picture I have of a Rogue Das Geheimnis."

"A Rogue what?" Asked Graham.

George cringed when the phone rang, dreading it being Frank's wife or even worse, a journalist. It turned out to be Trudy and Lau was with her.

"It's Trudy George and Lau is with me, we're in the lobby downstairs. Foxy had someone call us.....Eugenie is probably on her way too. We heard about it George, terrible..... Really terrible. Can we help?"

"Yes please Trudy..... Yes please."

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