

Ruby

Chapter 2 – The Accident

“She knew that there was no safe phone system, someone could listen in to all of them.”

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Spider quite liked London winters; they made wearing thick bulky coats essential. It was always much harder to conceal a weapon under thin summer clothes. He liked the feel of the Browning 9mm, as its holster bumped into his side as he walked. The army now used the Glock, but Spider had always had a thing about the Browning and he wasn't about to replace it. The bloody fuzz pestered him far too often for him to regularly carry a gun, but today was special; he was doing a favour for Ruby. Normally his much loved hand gun lived in a tin box, hidden under a lawn roller in his very grubby garden shed.

'Miss I Pearce – Flat 17'

Ruby had told him not to press her bell.

“If she hears your voice Spider, she'll probably call the police.” Ruby had told him.

He had to admit there was some justice in that. Spider prided himself on having an intimidating voice and appearance; they were necessary tools of his trade. He pressed another bell, one on the next floor down from Ingrid.

“Flower delivery for Miss Jenkins.”

“Er... what..... I'm not expecting anything.”

“They're nice flowers miss, but if you don't want them, I'll take them back to the shop.”

The buzzer sounded and he was through the outside doors. It always worked, he'd never found any woman who'd turn away a flower delivery. Men could be more awkward and paranoid, but free Pizza had opened up quite a few doors in the past. He walked down the corridor; it smelt of furniture polish and a flat with too many cats. Spider looked at the lift and it was quite old, one of those long thin lifts that makes a lot of noise when used. Spider had once been told that lots of private flats had long thin lifts.

“You have to just about be able to get a coffin inside.” A copper had once told him.

He wasn't sure if that was true, but he took the stairs, mainly to avoid Miss Jenkins. Knowing his luck she'd be prowling the corridor waiting for her flowers to arrive. He went up the stairs slowly, trying to make as little sound as possible. Spider didn't do much burgling anymore, his other interests paid better, but he still knew how to remain unseen and unheard. He looked at the door of flat 17 and there were no claw marks, the sort an over eager dog might make.

“Now it's all down to charm and luck.” He muttered to himself.

The door was solid, but it had a letter box, so he banged the lid a couple of times and put on his best smile. Spider wasn't in his comfort zone now. Someone to threaten or a shipment of drugs to buy and he'd be in his element, but charm wasn't part of his skillset. The door opened and the woman matched Ruby's description exactly.

“You must be Ingrid Pearce ?”

“Yes, what can I do for you ?”

She was looking past him and seemed concerned.

“You don't know me, but I was sent by Ruby Mason. You met her at one of George's parties in the summer, about six or seven months ago.”

“Ruby, yes, delightful girl.”

She was smiling at him now, so he unzipped the top half of his jacket and pulled out a letter.

"It is vital that you read this letter. It is from Ruby."

"Yes of course, come in."

He closed the door and they walked into the lounge as Ingrid read the letter. Anyone else and Spider would have read the letter about a minute after being given it, but not with Ruby. He wasn't sure if he was in love with her or scared of her, but he knew he didn't want to upset her. Ingrid had read the letter and was looking at him.

"You're armed I take it?"

He unzipped his jacket, letting it fall back to show the Browning in its holster.

"... And you know how to use it?"

"I was in the army for years. Nothing special, no SAS training or anything, but I know which end to point at people."

She smiled at him, but the letter was still taking most of her attention. It was only half a page of typing, but she read it through again.

"You're certain it is that serious?" She asked him.

Spider had no idea what was in the letter, or why Ruby wanted him take Ingrid Pearce to her cottage in Kent, he was following a list of simple instructions. He did what he always did in such situations, he looked sincere and lied.

"Yes Ingrid, it is that serious. My orders are to take you with me, but if it takes you longer than half an hour to pack.... I am to leave you and get to a place of safety."

Her eyes were almost bulging out of her head.

"They are coming that soon?"

"Yes, they are already on their way."

He'd expected her to fuss over what to take, to start dragging ludicrously heavy cases off the tops of wardrobes. Ingrid though was obviously ready for just such a fast exit from her current life, she'd probably had it planned for decades.

"The cupboard next to the front door.... Can you get the black briefcase?"

He went to the cupboard and found the case, it was quite heavy and made by Gucci, which amused him. Back into the lounge and there was already a case on wheels there and another Gucci case next to it.

"I'm in the bedroom."

She was having trouble getting her laptop into its bag, so he held it while she put the computer inside.

"You've obviously been expecting something like this." He said.

"It was almost certain to happen one day."

Who was she? Witness protection, head of a crime family? Spider had no ideas, but he carried her laptop into the lounge and picked up the handle to her case. Ingrid carried the two brief cases and they were ready to leave, all in under ten minutes. She still double locked the front door, habit he supposed.

"My car isn't far away." He said.

She pressed the lift button and gave him a long hard look.

"This place we're going..... It is safe?"

He'd only been there once or twice and on those occasions he'd been very drunk. Ruby hadn't told him her plans for Ingrid Pearce, or whether she was considered friend or foe. Once again he lied.

"Completely safe."

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“You didn’t send Spider, he’s not reliable.” Said Sarah.

Ruby realised that everybody was unreliable to Sarah, that was just the way she was made. She might have a point with Spider, but Ruby had him fairly well under control. For a start she was one of the few people who knew his given name was Rupert Bailey. She’d once asked him what his real name was and felt the ocean of bile and resentment fill his head. A boy child who was half Bengali and half Glaswegian and they’d called him Rupert..... Hell, it was almost guaranteed to turn him into a complete fuckup.

“He’s good at handling things like this,” she said, “he’s got the right experience.”

“That’s because he’s a drug dealer Ruby !”

She cringed. Sarah would never have said anything like that on her home phone, but she seemed under some illusion that mobiles were encrypted and safe. Probably she’d watched far too many TV shows where gangsters ran their empire with anonymous cell phones. Ruby knew a lot of obscure info about the intelligence community, she met quite a few of them at embassy parties and other social events. She knew that there was no safe phone system, someone could listen in to all of them. “You’re exaggerating Sarah.”

She knew it was a mistake as soon as she said it. Never tell someone with OCD that they’re exaggerating, she’d be telling her to pull herself together next.

“No I’m not. You’ve told me he’s into far worse, maybe even murder.”

Ruby was on her own phone, it had a personal contract on it and she didn’t think simply throwing it away was an option. She had two people in London who she thought of as....friends, yes friends, people who’d be there for her. The trouble was that both of them were damaged, maybe even as damaged as she was.

“I’ll be in London tomorrow, at my place. Come over in the evening and we can chat then.”

“You can’t just ignore what I said.....”

Ruby ended the call. Sarah would call back, at least a dozen times, which was why Ruby had never activated the voicemail service. Sarah would turn up at her flat, complete with a bottle of wine and an apology, they’d been through the routine many times. Ruby set her phone to silent and dropped it into the fruit bowl, watching as it lit up. Last time Sarah had called her eight times, the time before twelve. Today was likely to be a record. Always an even number of calls though, Sarah had a morbid dread of odd numbers.

The cottage was hers, although she was officially renting it from an offshore property company. A company owned by her false identity, the retired realtor from Cincinnati. Maybe it was a mistake to have Spider bring her to a cottage that could be traced to her ? Ruby knew that Jurgis would never have done anything so stupid. She went to the window and looked out over the ocean and decided the lonely cottage was perfect, but in future she would use the Jurgis principle to decide if something was safe enough. After all, there was no point in wasting a years experience with one of the top gangsters in Budapest. In future ? Ruby realised she’d made up her mind to go east again. George had a small job for her in London, but then it might be months until he needed her again. Besides, with modern air travel she could be anywhere he needed her in a day. It would be an hour at least until Spider arrived with Ingrid, so she put her Ipod in the docking bay on the HiFi and picked something mellow to listen to.

Paris first this time, she was going to be methodical and George had contacts in France who could help her. Her gift was good close up and one on one, but George had contacts who could get into the vast Interpol database of East European undesirables..... Kurt had to be in there somewhere.

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Ruby was christened Ruby Anne Mason, her father was an engineer and her mother was a teacher. Her mother had been a quiet but largely invisible part of her life. Ruby often thought her mother loved her, but she just wasn't very good at showing it. Her father had been the real problem.....An only child that they thought would never happen. Then daddies little girl had arrived and he'd become massively over protective and controlling. Nothing nasty, he'd never put a hand up her skirt or anything like that, he'd just never let her grow up. She was about six when he started to try and get rid of her friends, it appeared none of them were good enough for her.

"Lucy Forbes is always getting you into trouble, she's not welcome in this house."

Poor Lucy, her faithful friend, who had hidden in the garden shed with her and conspired at ways to thwart her father. Poor Lucy, who would still be alive if her father had managed to break up their friendship.

"Friends forever, help me carve it Ruby."

"Ok, but no blood, I'm not cutting myself."

In the end Lucy had carved the friends forever in the shed wall and they'd both solemnly sworn a lifelong oath. Then they'd brushed some red paint over their hands and put their handprint over the rough carving. It was a pity that lifelong for Lucy was only going to be about eighteen years.

The boom and bust economy had proved a blessing for Ruby. After leaving school at sixteen she'd been unable to find a job and was pointed at some sort of further education. She'd realised the potential of choosing a college a long way from home and still remembered the elation, the day she'd put her two cases and a bag of books into the minicab and left home. Her father had stood, arms crossed on the step as she'd climbed into the car.

"After all we've done for you. You'll be back when you want something."

Ruby never had gone back; she'd even stopped sending Christmas cards. In truth she'd gone back once when she was drunk, but not to see her parents. She and Sarah had climbed over the garden fence at about 3am on a hot summer night.

"There it is," she'd said, "you take the picture, I'm too drunk."

They'd both been very drunk, but the digital camera had taken a great picture of Ruby, grinning and pointing at the carving on the wall. The red paint had faded and the friends forever in the centre of a huge heart was easy to see. It was a good reminder of Lucy, of their friendship and Ruby still had that picture on her laptop.

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College in reality was only a souped up Sixth Form College and the course was boring, but Ruby put up with it. It meant freedom from home, the chance to play house with the five people she shared an old terraced house with and best of all..... she could have a proper boyfriend. Paul hadn't been her first, there had been Gary when she was fourteen, he'd been the first and despite all the warnings from her friends, the first time had been wonderful. No watching the fireworks of emotions in his head, her gift wasn't active then. But the intense pleasure from sex had left her wanting more. After Gary there had been another biker, again much older than her. Her father hated them all of course, perhaps that was why she chose them ? The irony was that once she was away from home, she went for a steady boyfriend that her parents would probably have liked.

Paul was a mechanic with a well-known car repair company, they even had adverts on the tele. He'd done his City and Guilds, whatever they were and he was well thought of where he worked. He was five years older than her, but she couldn't see her parents objecting to that. He was steady, reliable and dreadfully dull.

“What do you see in him ?” Angela had asked, more than once.

Angela, her other friend from nursery school. They’d been through so much together and yet once Lucy was dead, Angela had just drifted away. Angela Curtis, once voted the girl in the 4th year most likely to get pregnant before she was eighteen. Ruby made a mental note to visit Angela before she went to Paris. Dull and a little boring Paul may have been, but he’d enabled her to run a very old and unreliable car. There was no way her evening bar job paid enough to cover the frequent and extensive repairs.

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Her car, the much loved and cherished old Ford Focus. There was one distinct advantage to dating guys much older than her, they tended to have cars, even the bikers. By the time she was sixteen Ruby had not only learned to drive, she’d driven an old Citroen from London to Hastings a few times. At eighteen she took just three lessons with a proper driving school and passed her test first time. The problem though was the money to buy a car. Her college course had developed into a degree course, which meant a student loan and doing low paid bar jobs until she was twenty one.

One Sunday afternoon Paul had taken her to Cricklewood to see one of his friends. By chance they passed a car front and Lucy had almost instantly fallen in love with the old Ford. Silver Frost she later learned was the name of the colour, it looked slightly metallic. The price on the windscreen was just affordable if she borrowed from Angela and drew cash on her credit card.

“You’re joking Ruby, it’s a wreck.”

“It says it has a full years MOT.”

She’d pointed at the windscreen and pointed out the six months warranty.

“They’ll write the MOT out the day they sell it, it means nothing.”

A sales guy had taken offence at that comment and an argument began. Ruby ignored the row and sat in the Focus and knew it had to be hers. Lucy was always broke, but Angela had money and there was her credit card, perhaps Paul would relent and help out ? Paul did give her part of the money and within the week, Ruby was the proud owner of an old and dented Ford Focus. A few friends had suggested the years MOT that it came with didn’t seem to suit the dented wreck in the road outside the house she shared with five friends. But to her the car was a Rolls Royce because it gave her freedom and got her out of scary public transport.

“But it keeps letting you down.” Lucy often said.

True it had made her late for work once or twice, but there was always the AA and Paul had been around then. Good old boring but reliable Paul who kept asking her to marry him, but did have a way with her car and spent most Sundays keeping it maintained and on the road.

That night, the night her life changed had been a dull and rainy March night, a Friday she remembered. Rather than another Pizza followed by a shag with Paul she’d decided to have a night out with girls and had gone to a wonderfully seedy club in the West End. Angela had left early, but she’d decided to stay until they were invited to leave at 2am. The DJ had even put Bing Crosby’s White Christmas on to make sure the place emptied quickly.

“Can I give you a lift home ?” She’d asked.

A tear came to Ruby’s eye as she remembered her best friend Lucy accepting a lift. If only she’d gone for a mini cab as she usually did.

“I’m not trusting that heap of rust.”

Had been her usual comment about the much maligned Ford, but that night perhaps it was the end of the month and finances were tight ? For whatever reason Lucy followed her back to the car parked in a side street near Cleveland Street.

“Get the door open, I’m freezing.” Lucy Said.

Ruby was weeping as she remembered and looked at her keys to the Audi lying next to her laptop. Top of the range street sleeper, nothing too flashy looking, but fast, tough and reliable, not a car to get your best friend killed.

“Are they following us ?” She’d asked.

Lucy was a bit drunk and by the time Ruby noticed the large old Mercedes seemed to be turning with them at every set of light, Lucy was also half asleep.

“No Ruby, no more of that, just get me home.”

More of that ! Yes Ruby had been through a period when everything worried her just a bit too much, but she wasn’t crazy. By the time she realised she’d been watching the car behind a bit too much and the streets around them a bit too little, she was lost.

“Do you recognise where we are Lucy ?”

Lucy was fast asleep, or passed out might have described her better. The street sign said Cable Street E1. E1 ! They were miles away from where she wanted to be.

‘Calm Ruby, calm.’ She told herself.

Then in her mirror she saw the car again as it turned into the street a few yards behind her. Ruby forgot all about staying calm and took a left turn so quickly that she heard a wing mirror hit a parked car and hurtle off into the night. Still not fast enough the Mercedes was still there, perhaps even closer, the driver now flashing his lights at her. Had the driver been a he ? Even now, when she was calm and several years had intervened since that night she found it hard to think clearly about it, but yes a male face had been looking through the windscreen at her car.

The Streets signs had gone by so fast that she had no idea where she was and then as she turned a corner at speed the Focus stopped. It had done it before, the engine dying for no apparent reason, but that had usually been during the day on bright friendly streets with smiling people to help her push it into the kerb so she could get the AA to look at it.

“It does this all the time.” She had told a great many concerned strangers.

Now she was in a dark street in E1 with what looked like condemned warehouses either side of her and it must have been nearly 4am on a cold night. The Mercedes came around the corner at speed and couldn’t stop in time. Ruby remembered seeing the road going in front of her windscreen as her ancient Ford started to roll.

“Must have rolled over three times, a miracle you survived.” A policeman had told her.

She’d seen her friend briefly wake with a look of fear on her face and then everything had become a chaos of flying glass and crushed metal.

“Leave her, we have to go.”

By some miracle her car had landed on its wheels against the wall of one of the grey and drab looking warehouse buildings. She was conscious and her contact lenses hadn’t moved, so she could see the Mercedes with its crushed front and air bags coming out of the doors like huge pillows. One girl was helping a man to stand while another man who looked unhurt was in the middle of the road and looking at her.

“I felt her in the club. She’s almost one of us.”

The three people in the Mercedes were arguing and Ruby looked for Lucy and saw a bundle in the street wearing her dress, a very bloody bundle.

“I’m sorry !”

The man was at her car window and pulled her door open with some difficulty. Now the girl was behind him, a pretty brunette with high heels on.

“We have to go Kurt. You can’t invite her without permission.”

“Fuck permission.”

Kurt had leant into her car and briefly touched her cheek and then kissed her. Not a quick peck, but a full on open mouth kiss from a lover. It wasn’t just a kiss he’d given her, Ruby had felt something, like fingers delving into her mind. The girl had pulled him away, still shouting at him about rules as they got their injured friend and all three vanished into the night. The Police had told her the Mercedes had been in the country on foreign plates for two years.

“No one cares Miss Mason.” A man from the insurance company had told her.

“No insurance, registered to a fake address in Prague. The police just see the foreign plates and ignore it.”

Of course the man from the insurance had really told her that the police would of course find those responsible, the truth she had pulled out of his thoughts. Whatever else Kurt may have done besides the kiss, he seemed to have awoken something deep in her mind. She’d always seemed to understand how people were feeling, had more than her fair share of empathy, but her new gift was different. Paul, poor Paul. Once she’d taken a look into his mind, she’d realised there were no hidden depths to him, just more layers of dullness. After the funeral Ruby made a decision, she was going to head east. She was going in search of Kurt and his friends.

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The sound of the car brought Ruby out of her contemplation of the past. Her phone was glowing in the fruit bowl; Sarah was making her 8th attempt to contact her. It was beginning to get dark out, which was the problem with winters in Britain. Funny how she’d never even thought about how grim and short winter days were, until she’d visited warmer and sunnier places. Ruby turned on a few lights and went to the back door, the door that faced the paved area used as a car park.

“You made good time.” She said.

Spider was carrying a bag full of Chinese food; good it would save her having to put a meal together.

“A few road works just outside London, but then we had fairly empty roads.” He said.

Ingrid had her back to her and was fussing about with two very expensive looking brief cases. She turned towards her and began walking towards the house.

“We bought food at the village I hope that was ok ?”

“Yes, I’m a lousy cook.”

Another loose end ! Ruby just hoped that Spider had made her wait in the car while he bought the meal. So far all she was picking up from him was tiredness after a long drive with someone he thought was a bit creepy. Ruby grabbed the handle on Ingrid’s wheeled case.

“I’ll show you your room, then we can eat.”

As they went through the kitchen, Spider was opening cartons of food that smelt wonderful. Up the narrow stairs and they were into the guest bedroom. Ruby had spent a lot on the small cottage, only two bedrooms, but both had private bathrooms. Two sofa beds downstairs for guests she knew well and Ruby could sleep eight people at a pinch. Provided they knew each other well of course, or were prepared to get to know each other for the night. Ingrid put her precious Gucci cases by the bed.

“It’s beautiful, thank you for sending Spider for me.”

“We can discuss where you go from here later, let’s eat first.”

“I need to use..... the.....”

“Of course, sorry I’ll see you downstairs.”

Spider had warmed plates and emptied every carton into one of her Noritake bowls. He wasn't getting domesticated, he'd just copied how Sarah had laid out the Chinese the last time he'd stayed at the cottage.

"Hit woman." Said Spider.

"What ?"

"Ingrid was ready and prepared to leave her apartment in less than ten minutes..... Hit woman."

"Sshhhhh, she'll be down in a minute. Get the Soy sauce from the cupboard above the sink."

They ate around the rustic kitchen table, making small talk about the awful winter weather and whether the economy would ever pick up. Ruby found some ice cream in the freezer for desert and it wasn't until the coffee was brewing that Ingrid asked;

"Why did you send your man to save me ?"

Spider didn't react to being called her man, but she knew he'd tease her about it later. Spider may have been many things, but the thirty five year old ex-soldier most definitely wasn't her man. Ruby picked up her coffee cup.

"Why don't we relax in the lounge and I think Spider was about to go to the village pub to watch the football."

She had no idea if there was any football on, it just seemed a good excuse. Besides Spider was still walking about in his coat to cover his gun and it was making her uncomfortable.

"How long ?" He whispered to her as he left.

"Two hours should do."

Ruby brought the coffee tray into the lounge, complete with a plate of biscuits and some brown sugar for Ingrid.

"I sent Spider because we're far more alike than you realise."

Ingrid took her coffee with lots of cream and no less than three spoons of sugar. She sipped it and pronounced it as good.

"You can feel their emotions can't you Ingrid ?"

She drank her coffee, but Ruby knew Ingrid understood her.

"Who's emotions my dear ?"

"The people you've killed."

Ruby had wondered if Ingrid might attack her, but she'd taken the gamble that Ingrid needed her right now and besides, she was younger, fitter and trained in fighting dirty by Jurgis. Ingrid merely smiled at her and seemed delighted.

"You do too ! I knew it from the moment we met. Do you let your man do the killing while you feel the emotions ?"

"He's not my man, he's just useful sometimes."

"But you do feel things from people, as I do."

Ruby relaxed in her chair, the decision had been made and it had been done.

"My gift is more about words than yours. For instance if I were to ask you about the combination on your wonderful Gucci cases..... 1196, thank you."

Ingrid was actually applauding her, though she was starting to yawn.

"Superb Ruby, can you teach me how to do that ?"

"You wouldn't like it. When I looked into your mind, saw how Lilly Hughes had died and the others. I was sick and kept being sick for several days. Would you really want that Ingrid ? Or perhaps you would."

There was confusion in Ingrid's mind now, things obviously weren't quite what she'd expected.

"But I thought.....you saved me, I assumed you wanted to join with me, kill together."

"Ahh the letter, the one where I said your identity as Lilly's killer had been discovered. I put in enough detail to convince you, but not enough to give away the fact that it was I who was working for her family. Rather clever of me I thought."

"No assassin was on his way to my home ?"

"Yes, in a way."

Ingrid tried to stand up, but she had trouble coordinating her muscles and fell to the floor. Her right hand seemed to have a life of its own and was twitching and clenching over and over again.

"It was in the sugar you like so much. A poison that attacks the nervous system, quite painless I'm told. Not instant, it appears instant poisons only exist in Hollywood films. Highly corrosive poisons are quicker, but you'd be screaming and vomiting over my furniture."

"But why kill me ?"

Her voice was faint now. Ruby was no expert, but her contact had said between fifteen to twenty minutes and it was about seventeen since she'd sipped the coffee.

"Finding out why I enjoyed your thoughts was a plus, I now know why. You were feeding those feelings into me, seeing how I'd react, like a kind of emotional parasite. The money is nice too, so much, that is a nice and unexpected bonus. The real reason is that Lilly's parents decided not to kill you. George had found someone who was willing to do it and they had the money. But in the end they decided it was wrong. They decided that killing the murderer of their child was morally wrong."

Ingrid was very pale now, her breathing very slow and laboured, her voice barely a whisper.

"So you..... decided to do it."

"Yes Ingrid, I decided to do it."

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By the time Spider got back from the pub she had the money out of the Gucci brief cases and stacked in piles on the kitchen work top. Spider gave a low whistle and put a six pack of strong lager on the table.

"Did Ingrid give you the combination ?"

"Sort of."

"How much is there ?"

"Most of it is in the drug dealers friends, five hundred Euro notes. There are also high value dollar notes and some sterling. All in all, I make it just a little short of eight hundred thousand pounds."

Ruby pulled the ring pull on one of the beer cans and took a huge gulp, it was just what she needed.

"Where is Ingrid while you're going through her money ?"

She nodded in the direction of the lounge and watched as Spider nearly fell over the body on the floor.

"Fuck me Ruby, what happened. Shall I get a doctor."

"That might be a bit awkward as I poisoned her."

Spider came back to her and opened a can of beer himself.

"Was she a hit woman ? Was I right ?"

"No Spider, she just killed people for fun. She killed those who trusted her, she killed a sweet harmless girl called Lilly."

"What's this then ?"

Spider picked up the small automatic from the kitchen top. Ruby had no ideas what model it was, but it looked expensive and highly efficient.

"I found it on the floor. I think she was going for it when she fell over."

“Fuck Ruby, you’re not safe out on your own girl. I could have come back and found you both dead.” He was right of course. Ruby hadn’t found any inclination in Ingrid to carry or use a gun, but that was for pleasure, personal protection was obviously different. She’d made a silly mistake and Spider hadn’t been there to watch her back.

“That’s why I want you to come East with me Spider, be my tough guy.”

He was grinning at her now.

“Seriously,” she continued, “some of the money is yours, you earned it. Sarah is always broke, so she can have some. Most of it though can finance our trip.”

“So you’re thinking of bringing Sarah ?”

He was interested now. Ruby knew he and Sarah had screwed after a few of her parties. They thought no one knew, but of course Ruby always knew, Ruby knew everything. Well apart from Ingrid having a small automatic hidden in her clothing.

“The timing of Ingrid’s money is perfect,” she said, “clean notes that no one is looking for and the tax man won’t ask questions about.”

“I have commitments Ruby, I can’t just leave town at short notice.”

She could have offered him money, a hundred grand was probably more than he made in a year. But she wanted to see how strong her hold over him had become.

“Spider..... are you really going to let me go east on my own ?”

“You’ll have Sarah.”

“You know what I mean.”

He was giving her his best smile. It looked fairly horrific and would scare most people, but Ruby knew he was trying to be charming.

“Is it going to be separate bedrooms ?”

“I can’t speak for Sarah, but for us..... yes it will always be separate room.”

“Is it because my Mum is Bengali ?”

He was giving her a lopsided grin, which was slightly scarier than his Sunday best smile. Ruby leant towards him and kissed his cheek.

“No Rupert, it’s because you’re so damn ugly !”

He picked up the small automatic and released the magazine, letting it clatter onto the floor.

“You really aren’t safe on your own..... when do we leave ?”

“The day after tomorrow. But there is a loose end here to be tidied up.”

Ruby tilted her head in the direction of Ingrid and Spider went over to the body. He must have had experience at moving bodies, he had Ingrid over his shoulder in a matter of seconds.

“There’s some dangerous cliffs a few miles west, along the coast,” she said, “it’s a stormy winter night, she must have fallen over.”

“And the poison in her system ?”

“A suicide wanting to be sure.”

Spider shook his head at her and muttered again about her not being allowed out on her own. But he carried the body out to his car and Ruby heard him head west.

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