

Ruby 3

Chapter 11 – Doc’s Place

“Kallina moved herself to a high place in Machu Picchu. The only living creature that saw her was a lone Llama, who ignored her and carried on feeding.”

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The most expensive hotel in Nairobi and she wasn’t paying the bill. Sarah just hoped there’d be time for a little pampering; her nails were beginning to look neglected. She was feeling neglected all over, but nothing a pedicure, a massage and little wax wouldn’t put right. And her hair of course, which seemed to shout abuse at her out of the mirror.

“I’m going to book everything in for a service.” She said. “My body needs it, especially my bikini line. A few days on the run and I almost feel like a bag lady. I’m sure Ruby won’t mind if I run up a few things on the bill. Do you think she’ll mind?”

“No, I doubt if she’ll look at the bill before paying it.” Said Spider.

“You really think that? Now you’ve made me feel guilty.”

“You could pay for the extras yourself.”

“HmMMM I don’t feel that guilty.”

There had been some logic behind booking into the hotel, their security was almost legendary. Nothing too visible of course, nothing to make the guests feel nervous. Foreign businessmen and diplomats used the hotel, which had a reputation for being the most secure in Africa. Even the best hired assassins would think twice about trying anything.

“I just wish there was time to buy something new to wear.” She said.

“It’s a meeting at Doc’s place Sarah, a greasy garage.”

“Yes, but they’ll be there, the rogues. Ruby told me I had to be there, but refuses to say why. I feel under quite a lot of pressure.”

Spider was grinning and giving her the lopsided look she knew so well.

“I know, I know.....I’m thinking the arse out of everything again.” She said.

“Ruby said bring a gun. I think that says it all.” Said Spider. “It doesn’t matter how you look as long as you can use a gun.”

“Christ Spider! Supposing I can’t hit anything.....It’s been a while.”

“You’ll be fine, that’s why Ruby trusts you.”

They hugged, which turned into kissing and touching. There was her thing with Spider, the way a touch between her legs made her melt. It could be a gentle rub through two pairs of knickers and thick jeans, but she always melted.

“We’ve got time.....If we’re quick.” He said.

“Alright.”

Always fully undressed, even if it was going to be a quickie. Spider always impressed her, a stiff hard dick as soon as his boxer shorts came off. Just a brief stroke to feel the hotness in her hand and he was inside her, thrusting deep. Her hands went up to his shoulder blades, her nails pressing in to his muscles without quite scratching.

“Oh Spider, I love you.” She said.

Yes, saying it during sex was one of the great taboos, or at least incredibly cheesy. He hadn't said it back though. The sex was great, building up to be a bit of an epic quickie, maybe even legendary. He had her legs right up, using all his weight and strength to fuck hard and deep. But.....He hadn't said it back....She needed him to say it back. She needn't have worried, his mind had probably been on the sex. There was only so much blood in the male body and most of Spider's seemed to be in his dick, rather than his brain. Eventually he said it.

"I love you Sarah."

She wrapped her legs round him, using them to flip them both over, leaving her on top. For a while she carried on with the instinctive thrusting, though it wasn't why she'd wanted to be on top. Sarah pulled herself off him and looked at his huge engorged penis. She actually kissed the hot purple tip.

"I must do this before you cum and it gets messy." She said.

"And they say romance is dead."

She ran her lips down his dick, taking in just about all of it, feeling it rub down the back of her throat. Sarah had never been good at much while at the local comprehensive, but she'd always been good at blow jobs. One of her lecturers at college had given her an A++, with a special mention for enthusiasm. After using her hot breath and lips for a while, she stopped and looked at Spider.

"I am what I am Spider...Would you rather have me here, or Mary Poppins?"

"Oh, you.....You every time."

To reinforce the point, he gently pushed her head down again.

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Whoever had taken the rogue Das Geheimnis's body had not only known they'd be followed, Kallina was sure they'd wanted her to follow them. First there had been a trip across the globe to a ruined temple in the jungles of Myanmar. Before she could get her bearings, the tracker inside the body moved again, to somewhere in the deep cold of the Arctic Circle. The game began, it had to be a game they were playing with her and she had no other option than playing it out.

"Somewhere I recognise, Chichén Itzá." She muttered.

No sooner had she located the tracker than it moved again. Another ancient religious site, this time far to the north again. Inside a cave, with the neglected statue of a pagan God.

"What do you want?" She yelled.

No answer and the tracker had moved on again. Maybe it was a test of some kind, to see whether she'd be too fatigued to keep following the body. Whatever the reason, they kept bouncing her around the globe, until she no longer knew where she was. A temple in a jungle, followed by a shrine in the high Himalayas. It went on and on, until finally the game appeared to be over.

"Thank you.....Do we talk now?" She shouted.

The body was lying on what looked like a disused shrine at the bottom of a rocky valley. A high place, she could feel that by the air pressure. Perhaps somewhere in the Andes or the Himalayas, she honestly had no idea where they'd brought her. The shrine consisted of a cracked altar stone and a heavily weathered statue of a creature she didn't recognise. Kallina ran her hand over the body to make sure it was genuine and still had her tracker inside it.

"Why bring me here if you won't talk?" She yelled.

"They used to worship us once. This is one of the few sacred places of worship left in their world. Even Kurt never knew about this valley."

The tall female they'd seen in so many images Trudy had pulled out of the temporal lines. Tall and regal, she even seemed to walk over the stony ground in an arrogant manner. There was the strange walk, which Kallina knew had nothing to do with any kind of physical disability.

“The statue could be anything now.” Said Kallina.

“Yes, sadly time really does conquer all, even our sacred sites.”

There was the strange diction from vocal chords being forced into the restrictions of a human language. How old was the female though ? If Kurt had been right, some of them survived to reach a truly remarkable age. Kallina’s left hand began to crackle slightly, as she began to prepare for a fight. The tall female stopped where she was, holding her hands up, palms towards her.

“I just wanted to talk to you before the meeting with Ruby, and I wanted to make sure you arrived here alone. The body is yours to take back to them. The humans do love their procedures and finding names for everything. They can have his body.”

Kallina relaxed a little, though the crackle of pure energy remained in the palm of her hand.

“Talking of names, you seem to know mine.” Said Kallina. “Before we go any further I’d like to know yours ?”

“Even your tongue would have trouble with my real name. The Mayans had a name for me, which was ruined by European settlers, but it is at least pronounceable. Ixchel they called me, though I prefer it pronounced as Ishel. To the Mayans I was the Goddess of the Moon.”

“You’re really that old ?”

“Yes, the weather battered statue on the shrine is of me. Some of us die after a mere few hundred years, while some of us.....Let’s just say that I’ve watched mankind come of age.”

Kallina dug her tracker out of the body, using a little of the energy in her hand to turn it to ashes. She had the heavy dead male over her shoulder, before Ishel said anything.

“The body is yours to take. I did expect you to at least be curious about what I had to say.”

“A meeting before you talk to Ruby....Let me guess. We’re like cousins you and I and we should stick together. You might even come out with the old dogma about us being the legitimate rulers of this world. Am I right so far ?”

“Far too cynical Kallina. I realise there are far too few of us to rule the eight billion humans who walk the Earth.”

“But I bet you’d like to and the desire will always be there. Do your people call you Ishel ? My guess is that you’re Queen Ishel to them, or Ishel Goddess of the Moon. As for this meeting.....You will ask me to side with you instead of Ruby. After all, we’re closer to the genuine bloodline than her and the thirteen. Am I wrong about any of that ?”

“I prefer the title Guardian Ishel..... There’s obviously no use talking to you. Take the body and go. Not that the humans will learn anything from it that they don’t already know. It won’t be the first of us they’ve dissected. Will you be at the meeting with Ruby ?”

“Yes, I was hoping to be there.”

“When you see Ruby, will you tell her about this meeting ?”

“What meeting ? You simply gave me back the body. Anything else is purely my own ideas. Telling Ruby about it would only cause trouble. No matter what I think about you and your rogues, I firmly believe you and Ruby need to work together.”

“Good.....Though I detest the term rogue. I will see you at the meeting.”

Alone in the valley with a body over her shoulder and still no idea where she was. That was a problem, as knowing where she was meant the ability to get to somewhere else. Like a jammed inertial guidance system, Kallina was stuck where she was.

“I should have been more polite and asked Princess Ishel, or whatever she calls herself.” She muttered.

Line of sight was fine and she could just make out the top of the mountain above the valley. Kallina moved herself there and tried to ignore the cold and slight drizzle. Quite a bit of cloud, though her skills weren't hampered by the weather, unless it was bad enough to cause her physical injury. She closed her eyes and felt the world around her, allowing her senses to wander free.

"Machu Picchu, that will do perfectly. So I must be somewhere in the Andes."

Machu Picchu was a known place, she'd been there quite a few times, usually at night. Despite millions of visitors a year, there were still quiet spots in hard to reach places. Kallina liked to go there to meditate on particularly difficult problems. Pondering on things Ruby called it. A risk as she might appear in front of a tourist, before vanishing again.

"A woman with a huge dead monster over her shoulder.....Pahhh...No one will believe them anyway." She muttered.

Kallina moved herself to a high place in Machu Picchu. The only living creature that saw her was a lone Llama, who ignored her and carried on feeding. From the Andes she went straight back to the MOD laboratory. Not the ruined laboratory, she left the body with a very scared and confused front desk.

"The body is for Dr Patience Gaynor, she'll know what it's all about."

The man on the front desk looked to be on the verge of panic, but he did pick up the phone and call someone. Kallina left immediately, as she expected to be asked for a lot of pointless explanations.

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"Ideally I'd have looked the place over before we intended to deal with the targets." Said Pablo.

"I know, but we all know it has to be tonight." Said Charlotte. "What did you find ? More importantly, can you deactivate the CCTV and alarms ?"

They were all looking at each other and smiling, which was encouraging. Pablo was the leader of the group, with Jai as the tech expert and Christophe being the obligatory tough guy. Actually all of them were tough, but Christophe appeared to be looking forward to a night of mayhem.

"They put in a good system, for a small home in the suburbs." Said Jai. "For a mansion in a wealthy neighbourhood though, it's about the worst I've seen. Some home security sales guy sold them a real piece of crap."

"He means we can easily deactivate it." Added Pablo.

"Didn't I just say that ?" Asked Jai.

"No you didn't." Said Christophe.

Charlie was beginning to like the cartel guys. They seemed more human than she'd imagined they'd be. She wasn't exactly bonding with them, just connecting. She'd already made her mind up to connect with Pablo in a more physical way, when the opportunity presented itself.

"Spider always says phones are a nightmare." Said Charlotte. "Cutting the landlines just tells them you're on your way and cellphone blockers get picked up and reported."

"Spider is right, we'll have to get in quick and make sure no one calls for help." Said Pablo. "We have silencers on our guns and one huge advantage, we've done this sort of thing many times."

"I've almost lost count." Added Christophe.

"I doubt if the three or four people the Ostbys employ are even awake." Said Pablo. "They assume no one will make a move on their employers, because no one has in the past. An untested security team quickly becomes a lazy and soft security team."

It took Charlie a few seconds to realise they were waiting for her to say something, probably to tell them to move out, or something like that. She was their boss after all, one of the people paying them a lot of money for a few days work.

“There are four security people.” She said. “And you’re right, two are fast asleep. I can feel them from here, probably even tell you their dreams if we had time. We should get moving.”

The Ostbys had a lush garden full of trees, shrubs and even a pond. Perfect cover for anyone wanting to attack their mansion without being seen. Not that the Ostbys would have thought of it like that. The three cartel men vanished into the garden, with Charlotte following them.

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Finding a Hummer to hire had been easier than Spider had expected, Nairobi seemed almost awash with the civilian version of the military Humvee. Ruby considered Doc having one of the heavy vehicles to drive as essential, and she was rarely wrong when her hunches were strong. The vehicle was quite old, but felt huge and strong. They were early for the meeting, waiting two streets from Doc’s place of business. Doc was driving, with Anna sat next to him, a hunting rifle in her lap.

“We have to be able to pass a police inspection.” Doc had said. “Just a few tourists and some of my staff, getting an early start for a few days in the Great Rift Valley.”

Sarah was sat on the other side of the Hummer from him, staring out at the street. Angst overload, he’d seen her go through it before. Her heart would be close to tachycardia, with her refusing to eat anything, or even drink. He’d watched the self-torture too many times. On the plus side, she always came out of it stronger than she went in. Ruby was there of course, their commander in chief inside her battle wagon. As for everyone else ? They’d spread out through the neighbourhood. Nari had taken to the roofs with a sniper rifle and was currently watching the entrance to Doc’s yard. The strangest thing was Kallina, being her usual eccentric self. She was currently sat on the front of the Hummer, like some sort of blonde hood ornament.

“Is Kallina alright ?” Asked Anna. “She’s barely said two words to anyone since getting back from wherever she went.”

“Everyone is a bit tense, but they’ll be fine.” Said Spider.

“But still.....Not saying a word.” Persisted Anna. “Do you think the rogues made her an offer and she’s still considering it ?”

“Shut up Anna..... Shut the fuck up.” Snapped Sarah.

“We’re all eager for the meeting to happen, that’s all.” Said Ruby. “As for Kallina.....I’d never question her loyalty and neither should you Anna.”

“I wasn’t.....I was just.....”

“Enough, you haven’t see the way we can fight.” Said Ruby. “There might be peace tonight, or carnage. You think you’ve seen us in battle, but trust me, you haven’t.”

“I’ve seen Kallina cause destruction you wouldn’t believe.” Said Spider. “If things go wrong there might be a hole in the ground where this part of Nairobi used to be.”

Doc looked up and seemed to be about to say something, before going back to staring through the windscreen. They’d had the meeting at the hotel, all huddled together into the suite Ruby had booked to be their battle HQ. They’d all been told about Kallina recovering the dead rogue’s body from someone called Guardian Ishel.

“At least we now have a name for their leader.” Sophie had said.

Ruby had also told them about a conversation Trudy had with Foxy and the comments by Lily afterwards. A lot of glum faces followed the update, even if the news from Trudy wasn’t unexpected. “If there is serious trouble tonight.” Ruby had said. “British intelligence will cast us adrift, they’ll have no option. Some who were our friends are now getting worried about us and how close we are to the rogues.”

“Fools.” Nari had barked.

"Maybe, but we need their support if we're not going to live out our lives in hiding." Ruby had replied. "Lily told Trudy that Foxy will offer us support, no matter what. Obviously I hope tonight goes well, just don't hold back if it doesn't. I'd rather risk the wrath of the MOD, than have any of you killed."

"Maybe we need a code word that means we're to attack." Anna had suggested.

"Good idea, let's go with 'kill them all.'" Ruby had replied.

Now they were all sat in the Hummer, pondering their own views on the upcoming meeting. Spider couldn't help wondering how useful his gun would be against the rouge Das Geheimnis, people who could use thunderstorms as potent weapons. He put the large calibre automatic on his lap, as though it were a much loved child.

"Always starts with guns and ends with unimaginable forces." He said.

"I'm hoping we can come to an agreement with Ishel and go home without firing a shot." Said Ruby.

"Fat chance.....And I heard it's Guardian Ishel." Said Sarah.

"I'll call her anything she wants if it stops three square miles of Nairobi ending up looking like the aftermath of a nuclear strike."

Doc was beyond simply being uncomfortable with the conversation, Spider could see it in his face.

"Ruby.....I don't want to appear awkward....." He began.

"Trust me Doc," Ruby interrupted, "I will consider it a personal failure if we harm a single Kenyan tonight. Violence is a last resort."

"Or if they attack us." Said Sarah.

"Yes Sarah, or if they attack first. Come on, we'll go and get the office ready for our visitors. You can put the coffee on Anna."

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There were probably ways to use her gifts to turn off the alarms. Like Ruby, Charlotte tended to let people who obviously enjoyed messing with tech stuff, get on with messing with it. She watched the area, knowing who might be awake and cause problems, while Pablo's people dealt with the alarms.

"You need to cover your face before we go inside." Said Pablo

"Sorry, yes of course."

She'd been wearing the mask Pablo had given her, but pulled down to her neck. She pushed it up to cover her face. It was for the benefit of the Ostby's guards and domestic staff really. If they didn't see any faces, there was no need to kill them. Pablo was a professional assassin; he'd wanted to slaughter everyone in the house. He'd softened a little when she'd agreed to wear the mask. The cartel men were good; she'd expected them to be. In her mind Jai was a warm yellow dot moving back towards them, but she didn't hear a sound until he spoke.

"All their alarms and CCTV connections are now dead." He said.

Charlie felt exposed when she left the cover of a gazebo covered in vines and moved towards the back of the house. She leant against a set of French windows, while Pablo used a tool of some kind on the lock. In her mind she looked at everyone in the mansion, knowing which minds were still running hot and still awake. As the French windows opened, Pablo asked her the question.

"So Charlotte.....Who is still awake ?"

"Just the two guards doing a regular route around the house at regular intervals." She replied. "The cook and the two maids are asleep, as are the other two off duty guards."

"And the Ostbys ?"

"Sleeping like babies."

"Alright.....Let's do this." Said Pablo.

There was something, a dream in the mind of the driver who lived in the granny flat above the garage. No details, but his thoughts troubled her.

“Wait.” She said. “The driver is more than a driver. I feel he’s a man of violence, extreme violence. You should think of him as a fifth armed guard.”

It was the sort of thing usually picked up during one or two reconnaissance trips before the mission took place. She knew it and Pablo knew it, though he didn’t mention it. Too much haste, though there hadn’t been any alternative.

“But he is asleep ?” Asked Christophe.

“For now.....Be careful of him, really careful.”

No words, Christophe looked keen and Pablo just nodded at him. It was prearranged that Jai would bind and gag the domestic staff, with duct tape. As he left, it was just the two of them, keeping quiet and heading towards the stairs. At the top of the stairs she pointed to the left and put her finger to her lips. The first wide awake and alert guard was very close.

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Nari saw Ruby walking towards Doc’s yard and felt for anyone who was close enough to be a threat. There was no one, Ruby, Sarah and Spider had the block in the commercial district to themselves. Anna followed them at a bit of a distance and Doc must have remained in the Hummer. Nari put the sight of the sniper rifle to her eye and ran it over the nearest roofs, just to get to know the landscape. Two open flat roofs and one with enough large aircon units to hide an artillery piece. It didn’t take a genius to work out which roof an enemy sniper was likely to choose.

‘In position All clear.’ She sent as a text to Spider.

She realised the rogues weren’t an enemy yet, not officially an enemy until the meeting ended badly. Some of the thirteen thought coexistence was impossible. She’d had to remind them it had happened with her and her child.

“Yes, but you and Seong....You’re one of us. Family as Ruby calls it.” Sophie had said.

“But I wasn’t always like that Sophie. We need to listen to the rogues and give them a chance.”

Ryöm Kwan had been the leader of the gifted people in North Korea and although the thirteen conveniently chose to forget it, he had wanted to kill them all. Nari could understand how adversaries could become friends, or at least reach an accommodation.

‘They’re here Two black SUVs.’ She sent to Spider.

Close, they parked just about as close as it was possible to get to the gates to the yard. Ominously no one got out of the rear SUV. A tall female and two males left the front SUV and waked swiftly towards Doc’s place of business. Nari ran the night sight over them and recognised the female from the pictures everyone had on their phones.

‘Ishel and two males about to enter building.’

Spider had said that if it was a blatant trap, things would kick off no more than ten seconds after Ishel entered the building. He’d used the terms pear shaped and tits up too. Terms she was still getting used to and working out the correct usage scenario. After fifteen seconds she sent a text to Spider.

‘Tits not up or pear shaped.’

After thirty seconds a female got out of the rear SUV, carrying something which looked suspiciously like the kind of bag used to carry a sniper rifle. She looked up at the roofs, before heading towards the building with all the convenient aircon units.

“Now that I can respect.” Muttered Nari.

The female rogue hadn't broken into the building; she'd climbed up the outside. Using window surrounds and gaps in the cladding, she'd quickly scaled the commercial building. Sophie had shown her a video of a racoon climbing an office building and this was the same, only faster and far more impressive. No alarms set off, nothing to alert anyone to her presence. The sniper on the nearby roof used an aircon unit for cover, while aiming her rifle towards Doc's yard.

"I could hit you...I think. Let's just hope I don't need to try." She muttered.

Nari could see the female sniper as a glow in the dark. A glow using roof equipment as cover and a shield. The aircon unit didn't feel that dense to Nari, mainly fans and circuit boards. Almost certainly nothing dense enough to stop a high velocity bullet. Fire two or three times quickly and.....She was fairly certain she could kill the rogue sniper.

"Maybe.....If things go badly."

For now Nari watched the street below and hoped that the meeting was going well.

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The Ostby's mansion had lights on everywhere for the constantly patrolling guards. Not a huge amount of light, but still far better than using his night vision glasses. Christophe moved at speed through the mansion, his assault rifle up and set for single shot use. The more he thought about it, the more the Ostby's driver worried him. Armed and he concerned Charlotte. That meant they should all be worried. Christophe stopped as he saw one of the guards cross his path, before entering a room further along the corridor. The guards weren't his problem, Pablo and Charlotte would deal with them.

'Night fever, night fever

We know how to do it

Gimme that night fever, night fever....'

The Bee Gees were singing quietly on a radio somewhere. He was glad the mansion wasn't completely silent. A little noise would mask any slips he might make, any creak from ancient floorboards. He knew the floorplans; they'd all spent a while during the car journey studying them. As he reached the new conversion with its low ceilings and modern plaster walls, he knew he wasn't far from the driver's granny flat. Instinct made him stop when his right foot found the inevitable loose floorboard. The squeak had sounded loud enough to wake the dead.

"Is that you Alice?" Asked a male voice.

It seemed the driver was entertaining one of the maids. Christophe flattened himself against the wall next to a heavy looking hall cabinet. There was just enough room to aim his assault rifle in the direction of the male voice.

"Don't play hard to get Alice, I'm not in the mood."

A few minutes later a middle aged guy carrying a gun walked down the corridor, probably looking for the mysterious Alice. Charlotte was right, something about the way he carried himself shouted bad news. The driver was either ex-military or cartel trained, he was certain of it. Christophe remembered Charlotte wanting to keep the night free of bodies, if at all possible.

"I've an assault rifle aimed at your chest." He said. "Drop the gun and you might see another morning."

Military trained maybe, insane more than likely. The driver fired three times in his direction.

Christophe felt wood fragments hit his face, as one bullet hit the cabinet just a little above his head.

True to his word, he fired twice at the Ostby's driver, both bullets into the chest above the heart. He was still moving when Christophe reached him, which wasn't a surprise. Some strong men with determination had been known to live long enough to kill the gunman who'd shot them in the heart.

One bullet in the head and the driver was no longer a threat to anyone. Three shots without a silencer though....

"Fuck." Said Christophe. "You just woke up the whole damn house."

He turned and ran back towards the main building, speeding up when he heard two shots fired from a handgun.

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Anna sat on the edge of Doc's desk, a hunting rifle cradled in her arms. She liked the powerful rifle for its accuracy and high velocity bullets. It didn't have any automatic fire ability though, a definite disadvantage in her opinion. Like the others, she was hoping not to have to use any weapons during the meeting.

"They're coming to the door." Said Spider. "Ishel and two males."

There was a moment when everyone could hear the noise without realising what it was.

"She's being polite and banging on the door, even though we left it open." Said Ruby.

"I'll get it." Said Anna.

The rifle went over her shoulder, dangling from its sling. Tempting to look cool and leave it on the desk. Spider had warned them though.

"If it's going to kick off, it'll kick off fast."

Anna pulled the door open and tried not to show her shock at the sheer size and height of their guests. Pictures didn't do Ishel justice. Her physical presence alone was intimidating. No loose fitting coats to hide the extreme unhuman parts of her body. Anna had no idea what the various extra parts on Ishel's body did; just the sight of them freaked her out.

"Come in.....We just made fresh coffee....And there's food, all checked by Kallina to make sure you can eat it." Said Anna.

"How thoughtful of her." Said Ishel.

Kallina hadn't been there, but she was standing next to Ruby as Anna led their guests into Doc's office. No cat this time, which made a nice change. Constanze had been a regular breakfast guest when they'd been travelling across Kenya. It wasn't Kallina talking to the elderly cat that had freaked her out. It was the long one sided conversations between Kallina and her pet, where she seemed to hear answers to her questions.

"Thank you for agreeing to see me." Said Ishel.

"I'm sure the last thing any of us want is a war." Said Ruby.

It was strange to see the rogue's accept coffee and eat flapjacks, as if it was a gang of friends meeting to share gossip and recipes.

"Hmmm these are nice." Said one of the males, as he chewed.

Ishel gave him a look which told everyone the two males were just supposed to be guards, seen but not heard. After a polite amount of time, Ruby brought them back to the matter at hand.

"You asked for this meeting Ishel." She said. "I'm assuming you have a plan to discuss?"

No weapons on display, apart from her own hunting rifle. Anna hadn't known what to expect, though she hadn't expected that. Everyone round the table probably had a concealed weapon...Apart from Sarah of course. The silly airhead was digging through her bag, probably looking for a tissue to dab her makeup. Why Ruby seemed to value the woman was beyond her. Maybe they'd been lovers at college or something, she knew Ruby didn't always share her bed with a man.

"It's no huge secret, we both lead relatively small numbers of fighters." Said Ishel. "I know you call your small army the thirteen and rarely say it, but they're warriors."

"I would never deny that." Said Ruby. "My children have been well trained to survive and that has meant a lot of weapons training. Plus they're weapons in themselves."

Anna began to relax. Actually she was becoming bored quite quickly. It had been the same with the gang she'd worked for in Tallinn. Get a group of tough guys round a conference table and they all turned into boring bureaucrats. Nothing but yada yada, her mind was beginning to turn off.

"No lies, no playing one another." Said Ishel. "We both want to break the ancient seals and enter the last bastion of the old ones, the ones you insist on calling Das Geheimnis. Given that there are so few of us, it seems sensible to work together to achieve our aims."

"There is the question of who they might side with." Said Spider.

"Indeed there is." Said Ishel. "They may want to conquer mankind and rule this planet again. Or like that fool Kurt, they may be hell bent on giving up and dying out. I never did understand the appeal of racial suicide."

"Or they might all be dead by now." Said Kallina.

"There is that.....We might open the seal and find no one." Said Ruby.

Agitation, real agitation in the expression on Ishel's alien features. She might be good at a great many things, but she'd never make a decent poker player.

"I know there is someone there, waiting for the seals to be broken." Said Ishel.

"How do you know?" Asked Ruby.

More agitation, this time from Ishel's male guards. Their guests looked ill at ease, as though waiting for something to happen.

"I've been studying the various phenomenon in the Rift Valley for a long time." Said Ishel. "You'll have to take my word for it, but I have found a way to lift the veil a little. I can tell you there are definitely living creatures waiting to be released."

"No lying to us, no playing games." Said Kallina. "You need to be honest and show us what you've seen Ishel."

"Yes.....We need to know what you know." Said Ruby.

For Anna everything after that seemed to happen too fast, as though time itself was running far too fast. One of the male rogues suddenly had a weapon in his hand, aiming it at Ruby.

"Now.....We're going to begin this meeting again." Said Ishel.

The whirl of action and shortening of time felt worse. All illusion, Anna knew the various non-humans were moving at speeds she couldn't comprehend. Apart from air head Sarah, stupid, silly Sarah. There seemed no provocation, yet she lifted a Glock out of her bag, a small ladies version with a pink grip. She fired twice into the male rogue's face, killing him instantly.

"Christ!" Yelled Anna.

Sarah nearly killed the second male, hitting him twice in his left upper arm. Enough for him, he vanished instantly, like a magician's white rabbit. Anna expected Ishel to begin killing everyone in sight, yet Ruby and Kallina were holding her, pinning her to the ground.

"Stay here." Ruby yelled at Spider.

Kallina seemed to scoop Sarah up and they were gone, leaving just her and Spider in Doc's office. Spider instantly moved back against a wall, aiming his gun straight out in front of him.

"The damn things are so fast." He said.

Just the rogues, or all the gifted beings? Anna wasn't sure how he'd meant it. She felt so out of her league, like the man in the saying who takes a knife to a gunfight. She backed against a wall and held the hunting rifle up and ready.

"Do you think there are many more of them?" Asked Anna.

“No way of knowing.”

“So what do we do ?”

“Stay here as Ruby said, and see what happens.”

Christ, that was the plan ?! Anna aimed at the office door and managed to miss the second male returning. As she looked around to tell Spider the plan stank, she saw the wounded rogue, blood oozing from the holes Sarah had put in him. His claw like hand was reaching for the left side of Spider’s head.

“Spider.....Behind you !” She yelled.

No use, he didn’t have time to move and her rifle wouldn’t come up quickly enough. Spider was going to be killed or seriously injured and there was nothing she could do about it. The claw never reached him though, the blow never came. Instead the claw began to fall apart and become nothing but ash..... Falling to the floor. He came apart that rogue, without uttering a cry or scream. As he became smouldering ash on the floor, Anna could see Sophie, her glowing hand outstretched.

“Second time I’ve saved you Spider.....No actually about the fourth when I think about it. You must owe me by now.....Owe me big time.” Said Sophie.

“Name your price Sophie, I’ll gladly pay it.”

“Oh, I’ll think of something. Ruby sent me, she thought you might need help.”

There she was smiling, the girl seemed to think it was all great fun. Anna still felt terrified, waiting for the rogue horde to arrive.

“Is that it Sophie ?” She asked. “Will we have to fight more of them ?”

“Has the war started ?” Asked Spider.

“War ? You’ve seen our wars Spider.” Said Sophie. “Let’s call this a bit of hard bargaining before Ruby and Ishel get down to the serious negotiating.”

“Where are they ? Where did they take Ishel ?” Asked Anna.

“Into the Hummer, poor Doc isn’t happy about it at all.” Said Sophie. “They have Ishel on her own there, no sudden arrival of her minions to worry about. They’ll talk while we remain here.”

Anna still had adrenaline flowing through her blood, ready to fight or run at a moment’s notice. She held her rifle up, aimed at the office door.

“Are we still in danger ?” She asked.

“I’m not sure, but I don’t think so.” Said Sophie. “Now.....Ruby said you had proper coffee and flapjacks.”

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