

Ruby V : Machu Picchu

Chapter 13 – Professor Nicholas

“Lorenzo was sure it was her lack of infallibility that made their relationship possible. All the wunderkind gifts were wonderful, but it was reassuring that occasionally she was just like a normal person.”

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Lily had been taken to another office, as Darius wanted their one on one meeting to be just that, just him and her. Darius arrived late, though not late enough to moan about. She needed him more than he needed her and a few minutes left looking at the room’s décor, reminded her of that. He’d have been told that in all likelihood the brain wave jammer worked, or whatever they called it. A long and over fussy name probably, with lots of jargon words. Ruby had to have a small dig at Darius T Weisbaum; it was all part of the game.

“Darius, you’re a long way from home.” Said Ruby. “I thought you still looked after Western Europe.....Unless your remit has grown ?”

It would have been so nice to see inside his head; even a hint of his mood would have been good. His mind was closed to her though, like trying to examine a brick wall. Ruby had already decided that once she was back in London, there’d be a new number one item on her agenda. Find out how the mind blocker worked and find someone with the skill to build a device to stop it working.

“I am still in charge of Western Europe.” Said Darius. “Really I’m way out of my territory, but I was asked to see you. There are those above me, who thought you’d like to see someone you know.....A friendly face.”

Tempting to ask when they were going to arrive. Aggravating Darius would do no good though, apart from making her feel a little more cheerful. If he clammed up on her, she’d lose access to the CIA database.

“So.....I heard there were developments in West Virginia.” Said Ruby.

“Yes and we owe you a debt of gratitude.” Said Darius. “No sarcasm there, I promise you. The Colonel had enough well-armed followers to cause havoc. If you hadn’t pointed us at Two Pines Lake, it could have been very bad. Just the sort of cult who think it’s acceptable to plant explosives in public buildings.”

“Did you get him ? The Colonel I mean.” Asked Ruby.

“Sadly no, he seems to have escaped quite early in the raid on the cabins. Two Pines is a family holiday destination, right next to the lake. Lots of trails and paths into the surrounding woods. We lost him, Ruby.”

“Did you capture his followers ?” She asked.

Darius waved at someone sat out of earshot, the same woman who’d brought her down in the elevator.

“Is the Two Pines file copied ?” Asked Darius.

“Yes, I have Ruby’s copy.”

The file arrived and the Ruby’s copy comment was encouraging. Her memory was good, but nothing is as good as a file with all the information and hand written notes. Darius put the beige file on the table, without sliding it across to her.

"The Colonel has been identified with some degree of certainty." Said Darius. "It's all in the file.....He's still officially a reserve and could be called up at times of war or insurrection.....Yada-yada. This file is for you and only you, Ruby Mason. I want to emphasise that. No running off a copy for Foxy. No one wants our dirty linen aired in public."

Yet she was getting the full file, judging by the huge amount of bumf in the beige folder. Darius wanted something and it was likely to be a large something.

"You have my word, only I will read the file." Said Ruby. "I will need to give my people a full briefing though, if you want us to handle the situation?"

"Handle the situation....."

Darius went into vague mode; she'd seen him do it during meetings with Foxy. He was looking at the file under his right hand, as though it might burst into flames. After a count of about fifty, he slid it over the table at her.

"At one time, Ruby." Said Darius. "There was no need for others to handle our problems. Some senior people still call those the good old days. Now.....It's two pages of questions if someone gets a paper cut. So yes, you might get a call asking you to deal with the situation. Would that worry you?"

"No, not at all.....The Colonel seems intent on killing me."

Ruby opened the file and there was a picture that she could have drawn after looking at Liam's memories. Grey hair, grey beard and that definite military look. Colonel Arthur Moore according to the file, arrived at by the number of his followers who'd served with him, or under him, during their period of service. Arthur's wife had died a year or so ago, under mysterious circumstances. The Colonel had run and no one had seen him since.

"There is a note.....His extreme religious views had been causing concern." Said Darius.

"And I'm guessing his wife didn't share his views?" She asked.

"Honestly, we have no idea." Said Darius. "Bludgeoned to death and the local police are certain he killed her."

There was a sealed envelope under the armed forces notes on Arthur. It had a red edge around it and a warning that by opening it, she was agreeing to several dire and draconian threats. Legal threats of course, according to Darius the CIA were now law abiding. Ruby looked at Darius, who merely shrugged at her. Opening the fairly thick envelope was irresistible.

"Has anyone been charged with anything dreadful, after opening one of these?" She asked.

"Oh yes, a few are still in prison." Said Darius. "Don't be too concerned though, they couldn't keep their mouths shut."

Again, Ruby really did need to look into his mind; the envelope's contents had to be fake. The same typewritten style on some pages, as used on the documents she'd found in Lima. There was even a mention of Operation Forty Love. The insane part was a link to The Colonel, who'd lost someone in the whole ghastly mess.

"A religious zealot with a personal grudge, that always ends well." She said. "Are the contents of the envelope genuine?"

"What do you think?"

She read every page in the envelope with a red edge. It was insane, but the kind of insanity coincidence can sometimes inflict on the sane. The Colonel had been involved with Tilda, the woman found dead in the house in Lima, the house The Colonel had probably had torched. Unless the CIA had done it, which wasn't out of the question. Arthur and Tilda had both been young people when Operation Forty Love had been live and running.

“His first great love and the people he worked for implicated in her death.” Said Ruby. “It’s so wild that it’s probably true. I also think that he’ll come after me again, which means I can do what you can’t.....I’ll deal with Arthur Moore.”

“Good.....The file is yours Ruby, but please.....Keep it safe and keep it private.” Said Darius.

He seemed ready to end the meeting, lots of fussing about and moving his chair back. For Ruby, the big question, the elephant in the room, hadn’t been mentioned.

“Before I go.....Was Operation Forty Love genuine, or an invention by a hostile government ?” She asked.

“Ahhh, the assassination of a key member of the government of a fairly friendly nation. They might be our allies now, but they weren’t then. There was even a trip to Libya.....Not considered a friendly act in those days.”

“Just the kind of job you’d use a man like Arthur to carry out.....Was it the CIA ?” Asked Ruby.

If only she could see into his mind. Darius looked spent, almost collapsing back into his chair. All intelligence organisations leaked, it almost came with the territory. Employ thousands of spies, cryptologists and general malcontents and a few will turn on you, it’s inevitable. A few American politicians had probably heard rumours about Forty Love. They’d be asking the same kind of question Ruby had asked.

“Ruby.....At the end of the day, to you personally. Does it matter who carried out the assassination ? It was all a long time ago and many of those involved are now dead. I will tell you, if you really.....Really need to know. I would rather not, but the choice is yours. So, do you really want to know ? Is it that important to you ?”

Maybe it was her age, George had always said she’d mellow with age and she was now twenty eight. Mellowing was one thing, but her moral compass seemed to have been bent out of alignment too. She’d seen so many things; there had been so many ghastly decisions to make. There had been so many deaths, including Kallina and Max.

“No, it doesn’t matter that much, keep your secrets.” Said Ruby.

“Good.....Good....We can talk again once Arthur Moore is no longer a problem.”

Lily would be happy of course, as would Mara. Ruby had stopped merely paddling in the murky waters and had jumped right in.....At the deep end.

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Lorenzo Bianchi, Lol to his girlfriend Eugenie, quite liked the way his life was developing. Seeing the world in the company of the woman he loved, with enough money to enjoy themselves. The seedy side of their life didn’t worry him that much and as for the danger.....To Lorenzo the danger and excitement were the icing on a delicious cake. His own parents hadn’t exactly been model citizens. Being part of a criminal empire, or whatever Ruby was into, had been infused into his blood along with his mother’s milk. It was a lovely sunny day in Lima, with a forecast high of twenty three degrees. Even the prospect of spending the day in their hire car, watching Alessia House, hadn’t dented his good mood.

“Damn.....I know it’s not that hot.” Said Eugenie. “I forgot the sun block.....I remember putting it on the table to pack.”

“I can go for some; Sophie mentioned a supermarket just two blocks away.” He said.

“Are you sure ? We really shouldn’t split up.”

“I can look after myself and I’ve got a few bank cards.....They’re bound to accept one of them.”

“Fine.....Call me if there’s a problem.” Said Eugenie. “I know we brought food, but if you see anything nice to nibble. You know what I like.”

“Alright.....I’ll see what they have.”

The BMW was parked about ten car lengths away, on the other side of the road. A dark coloured BMW with a man and woman sat in the front. Lorenzo still would have ignored the car and its occupants. There was a definite feeling though, a vibe. To him it seemed that while he was trying hard not to show an interest in them, the couple were working just as hard to ignore him. They were quite still, staring intently out of the windscreen. Lorenzo could hardly run back to Eugenie, so he carried on and found the supermarket.

“Coconut.....She loves things with coconut.” He muttered.

He bought a basketful of nibbles, including some nice coconut macaroons with a long expiry date. Two bottles of sun block, it would all get used up before they left Peru. On the way back he noticed the BMW was still there, with the couple still looking determined not to notice him. There was a blanket on the back seat, as though they’d been there all night. Eugenie would know for certain, but to Lorenzo, the couple didn’t feel right. Eugenie loved the macaroons, but wasn’t keen on his choice of sun block.

“Did you feel anything from the couple in the BMW ?” He asked.

“What BMW ?” Asked Eugenie.

“Back the way I just came, up near the corner, other side of the road. There’s a man and a woman sat in the front.” He said.

“No.....To be honest, I wasn’t actively looking for anything.” Said Eugenie.

Lorenzo was sure it was her lack of infallibility that made their relationship possible. All the wunderkind gifts were wonderful, but it was reassuring that occasionally she was just like a normal person.

“I think it might be them.....They have a weird intense vibe.” He said.

“If I go and take a look, they might either drive away or do a Butch and Sundance.”

“A what ?” He asked.

“Come out with all guns blazing.....I do have an idea.”

Eugenie altered the wing mirror and looked in it for a few seconds.

“Good place for them to park.” Said Eugenie. “I can just about see their car and they can probably see us. I think we should drive slowly away and see if they follow us.....What do you think, Lol ?”

“Sounds good.....If they follow us you can see if they have hostile intent.” Said Lorenzo. “What then, once we have them on our tail ?”

“Swap seats, you can drive.” Said Eugenie.

They clambered over each other, with Eugenie taking the bag of nibbles with her. Lorenzo was left in the driver’s seat, wondering what was coming next.

“I’ll concentrate on them, while you drive.” Said Eugenie. “If they follow us and if they’re who we think they are.....Take us on a nice steady drive out of the city. We’ll wait until we’re on a quiet road, with very little traffic. Then we’ll sort them out.....Alive though, Ruby will want them alive.”

It might not do any good, yet Lorenzo felt the need to point out the obvious.

“They will have guns and.....We don’t.” He said.

“Oh, don’t worry about that.”

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Monique seemed to have discussed Abe with everyone. Every time she came up with an idea to keep him busy, he hated it, or it didn’t match his skills. Yes, he had a lot of special gifts, but he could hardly use those on a daily basis. Suggestions about college courses usually received a grunt and a

certain look. He'd studied English in Somalia and Abe had hated every day of his studies. He was intelligent and eager, but he had no desire to attend boring college courses, for the sake of it.

"So, what would you like to study?" She'd asked him.

"Computers.....I'd love to design web sites."

"You and everyone else under the age of thirty, Abe. Supply is hugely exceeding demand at the moment....Anything else?"

"Trading.....Not the Bitcoin type crap, you might as well go to a casino. I mean a proper trading floor for shares, maybe commodities.....I tried a piece of training software and did well on currency trading. It was only a simulation though."

It was like a bell going off in her head. There was someone who traded in everything Abe had mentioned and the man in charge had a soft spot for her. Ruby said he thought of them all as the kids he'd never had.

"George Polandrous has a trading floor, he even has derivative trading." She said. "An office close enough to get to on the tube every morning. I'd have to ask him, but I can't see him saying no. How do you fancy working there as a trainee? A paid trainee, I can arrange that."

"Really? Everyone wants to do that, my friends will be so jealous."

"So it's a yes then?" She asked.

"Yes please."

"I'll make the call now."

It was late, rather than inappropriately late. Monique used the phone in Ruby's bedroom. As usual, George talked to her as though he'd been waiting all day for her to call. Sometimes he had a bad day, but usually, he made people on the phone feel as though they were getting a hundred percent of his attention.

"Monique.....I heard you were back in London." Said George.

"George, I'll come straight out with it, I'm looking for a favour."

"Fire away, what can I help you with?" George asked.

"Abe wants to learn the ins and out of a busy trading floor. I can arrange for him to get paid. I was hoping you might take him on as a trainee. He's bright and very keen."

George went quiet on her, not necessarily a bad sign. Monique knew he'd be thinking it through, working out the pros and cons. His company had probably taken on their quota of trainees for the year.

"If he's here, I'll pay Abe." Said George. "I expect his refugee status complicates thing, so I'll arrange something in cash. Tell him he needs to see it through, no getting bored by all the maths."

"I will George; I will.....Abe won't let you down."

"Hmmmmm, get him here for nine on Monday."

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Ellie Nicholas, actually Professor Ellie Nicholas, though everyone tended to call her Ellie, was happy. Down a damp hole in the ground, covered in dirt and loose soil. The object in her hands didn't glint; it wasn't made of gold or particularly pleasing to the eye. Mars was right though, the girl had a good eye for such things.

"You're right; this could change the history books." Said Ellie.

"I knew it, the runes are like nothing ever seen before, at least not in Peru." Said Mars.

Ellie used her hand to brush dirt off the bronze figurine of a woman, a short squat woman. It would need careful cleaning to be sure, but the figurine didn't look like anything found before, at least not in South America. In the Balkans maybe, definitely like pagan items found in Poland. On her back,

the squat figure had runes, cut into the bronze. Ellie would need to work on them and make a few calls, to understand them, though she recognised one set of runes. She did the unforgivable by spitting on her finger and rubbing centuries of dirt off the runes.

"There.....Another mention of Baba Yaga." Said Ellie.

"A famous witch from Eastern Europe.....No one will believe us." Said Jim.

"I know someone who will." Said Ellie.

Another broken rule, the students might even report her to the university. There was a bucket of water used to wet down hard areas of soil. Ellie used the water and a stiff brush to thoroughly clean the bronze figure. It still looked grubby and would continue to look dirty until it was expertly cleaned for display. Then it would look magnificent.

"I'm not about to criticise, but....." Began Mars.

"I know, there isn't time to be slow and careful." Said Ellie. "This has been in the ground for a very long time and.....It's bronze for fuck sake, the brush won't damage it."

Off-piste archaeological procedure and now swearing in front of the student volunteers. Ellie just knew she'd get an invite to talk to human resources. Bad language when drunk was normal, though swearing when sober was a huge sin, at least in the eyes of the university. Mars was looking at her with an unusually timid look in her eyes.

"Sorry.....Good find all of you." Said Ellie. "I'm taking this for a while.....I need to show it to someone."

They had a finds table covered in bronze items, all of them typical for that area of Peru. There were some really nice pieces, some potentially major finds. Ellie quickly looked them over to refresh her memory. Any museum of Peruvian prehistory would have killed for some of the finds, but none of them were anything like the short, squat figure of a woman. Was the figure Baba Yaga herself? It was crazy, impossible.....But if it was true! Ellie rushed back to her tent, where she was set up for the day. A different tent from the day before, in the hope of a little peace and quiet until the students found her new hiding place. Not that she'd ever admit to hiding herself away. She used a dry cloth on the runes, bringing them into sharper relief.

"She'll know, I'm sure of it." She muttered.

The Satphone could be a bit temperamental at sending pictures; three or four images at a time were its reliable limit. Mars joked that it was the trees causing the problem, as their branches waved about in the wind. Ellie took four pictures of the figure, two of them of the runes. That wasn't it; they needed cropping and shrinking, which she tended to do on her laptop. Then she added them to a message to the cellphone number she had for Ruby. A quick plea to whoever looked after her luck.....

"Please.....Let these arrive legible and in one piece." Ellie muttered.

A message added about just finding the figure and that it had Baba Yaga runes on its back. Ruby would know what the runes meant, or she'd know someone who did. The name of an East European witch was found on a standing stone and then Ruby Mason wanted to visit. Ellie wasn't one of those people who never accepts coincidences. But Ruby was coming to investigate the link with the ancient deathless witch and Peru, Ellie was sure of it.

'.....We're ready for you to arrive.' She ended the message.

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Eugenie had pulled a lot from the minds of the couple in the BMW. They were indeed watching Alessia House and held a deep hatred for everyone there. Their game plan seemed to be to watch

the house, but use every opportunity to kill anyone stupid enough to travel alone. They seemed to have decided that she and Lol fitted their game plan.

"They don't like us.....All that hate in their heads." Said Eugenie. "It's giving me a headache."

"Do you want me to keep driving away from Lima ?" Asked Lol.

She knew why he was asking, the small local roads away from the city, could be fairly grim.

Sometimes quite narrow, too narrow for a car chase at speed. Quite a lot of loose stuff too on some corners, probably fallen from farming equipment. Soon they'd be on farm tracks, still trying to outrun the dark coloured BMW. Their hired hatchback was quite nippy, but it was no rally car.

"Yes.....For now.....Where are we, Lol ?" She asked.

"We're heading roughly north." Said Lol. "The last road sign I saw, was pointing to somewhere called Kankay Resort. I think we're now officially in the middle of nowhere."

"HMMMMMM I'm getting in the back." She said.

She was quite athletic, getting over the seats and into the back wasn't hard. Luckily, she had her feet firmly wedged on the rear seat, when Lol took the next corner at speed. It all felt and looked worse in the back, the slewing around and the cascade of crap that flew up. She felt the car hit something hard, though it didn't stop.

"What did we hit ?" She asked.

"No idea, probably the exhaust hit the ground." Said Lol. "We should be driving something with decent ground clearance.....Like a Humvee."

"Yeah, we'll get one of those next time." She said. "Out of interest, did you hire this car under your real name ?"

"No, of course not.....I'm Jerome L Hooper from Wilmington, Delaware."

Ruby had given everyone in Alessia House instructions to use their own names on everything from train tickets to car hire. Eugenie was happy that Lol had either ignored the rules, or simply hadn't heard about them. Her half formed plan had been to let the couple follow them out of town and then turn the tables on them. It was the whole turning the tables business that was causing problems.

"Can't you zap them ? We're in the middle of nowhere. No one will see." Said Lol.

"I'm thinking.....It has to look natural. The only place where a modern, well maintained car bursts into a ball of all consuming flames....Is at the movies."

"We need to do something." Said Lol.

The next corner and the road became worse. Lol was a good driver, though she noticed him slow down. It was a farm track, with clumps of mud every few yards and areas of grit. The couple in the BMW obviously decided they also....Needed to do something. A gun was fired, a large calibre handgun by the sound of it. Eugenie had no idea where the bullet had gone and was just happy it hadn't hit their hatchback. At the next almost impossible bend to take at their speed, the trees next to the road gave Eugenie the idea. She just hoped it turned out to be the right idea.

"They just fired again." Said Lol.

"I know.....You need to be going faster at the next bend."

She'd heard two shots and one had hit metal, probably somewhere on their car. Neither of them was yelling or bleeding, which was good news, but if a large calibre bullet hit the engine.....

"If I speed up, we'll leave the road." Said Lol.

"I trust you Lol, we need to go faster.....As fast as you dare."

The road had to be making it harder to aim, the next bullet made a clang as it hit somewhere on the car that wasn't them. Eugenie looked around and the perfect corner was approaching. It was a sharp corner, a very sharp and difficult looking turn in the road.

"No.....No slowing down.....I need them to be struggling too." She said.

"Fine, but I'm not guaranteeing we'll stay on the road."

One last shot before the bend and the bullet hit the roof just above her head. Whoever was firing the gun was learning, the next shot might well end her life. Lol kept their hired car on the road, though it did briefly bounce along with two wheels slightly in the air. Eugenie concentrated on a force skill she would have gladly admitted wasn't her best skill. There was competition among the wunderkinds, with many claiming to be best at this or that. In reality, she knew her gifts were probably as good as anyone else's.

"Here they come." She yelled.

The BMW was sure footed and had far more power. As it took the corner, it went over on its suspension, though there was no sign of any of its wheels coming off the road. At what she hoped was right moment; Eugenie hit it with the kind of force Abe had used to crush a full dumpster. It was like giving the heavy BMW a good hard shove. Her feelings of desperation probably added to the power of the shove. The heavy car went right over on its side. It rolled over once, side over side.....Before colliding with a very large and solid looking tree. Lol must have been watching in the rear view mirror.

"Fuck.....It worked." Lol muttered.

"Back.....Reverse Lol, we need to see if they're alive." She said.

While Lol took their car carefully backwards to where the buckled BMW rested on a tree, Eugenie closed her eyes and concentrated. She could tell where people were, living warm people with a beating heart. There were none within a hundred yards of the car and the tree, which meant the couple were dead. There was a crowd of people in a field some way off, but none of them were moving in their direction. A bus full of school kids could come round the corner of course, but she thought it was worth the risk.

"They're dead; though I still want to look at their car.....They might have a pile of information on us."

"Yeah....They'd need names and pictures of everyone." Said Lol.

No need to tell him not to touch anything with bare hands, he was pulling on rubber gloves as they left their hatchback. Their car would need to be left somewhere and torched. There were two fairly obvious bullet holes, one in the roof and one in the boot lid.

"Wow....We were lucky." Said Lol.

Eugenie hadn't realised she'd put so much force into shoving the BMW off the road. It had hit the tree so hard, that the couple had probably been killed fairly instantly. Lots of blood and they looked like broken dolls, marionettes who'd had their wires cut.

"Paperwork Lol, dig about a bit.....I'll look in the glove box." She said.

There was a gun in there, which she was tempted to take. The amount of arguing it would cause with Ruby.....In the end Eugenie left it where it was. On the floor near the dead woman, was a supermarket bag containing donuts and a few bottles of soda. It was the same supermarket Lol had used; the bag was identical to the one with their macaroons inside. It was Lol who found the leather shoulder bag on the floor at the rear of the wrecked car.

"It's full of pictures and information on us all." Said Lol. "There are more pictures than in my high school yearbook."

“There could be more of it, shoved anywhere by the crash.....I found a gun.” She said. “It’ll need setting alight, but I can make it look like the crash caused it.”

“Don’t you always say that only happens in movies ?”

He was grinning and it was impossible not to grin back.

“This will be the exception to the rule.....Bring the shoulder bag, Ruby will want to see it.”

Their hatchback with bullet holes was a little way from the wrecked BMW. Far enough away to be safe from what Eugenie intended to do. There were still no people in the immediate area, though the fire and smoke would change that.

“So, we’re really a hundred percent certain they’re dead ?” Asked Lol.

“Yes.....If you’re feeling squeamish you can wait in the car.”

“No.....No, I’ll be fine.” Said Lol.

Charlotte was the real creature of flames; there were times when that persona seemed to take her over. Charlie could come out of an inferno with much of her skin burned away. Two days later and she’d be fully healed and she claimed there was no pain. Eugenie had enough control of flames and burning to get the job done, which to her, was good enough.

“I just realised.....I haven’t done this for at least three years.” She said.

Eugenie imagined a flame in the palm of her left hand. Just a spark at first, before it quickly became a spinning ball of fire. Still not that large, it didn’t need to be. Hot though, the heat intense enough to ignite quite a few things in the interior of the dead couple’s car. It would look like a natural result of the crash, even if an expert became involved. An expert looking into a routine road traffic accident.....It wasn’t much of a risk at all.

“Wow, is that painful ?” Asked Lol.

“Just.....Stings a little.”

She thought of the fire being inside the car and the spinning ball of flame left her hand. It went forward, through the side window that no longer had any glass. As it hit the interior, the flames found plenty to feed on. A fire quickly began, though it would take a while to build. Ruby had once torched a car in Budapest, a very long and old story. Anyway, that particular car had taken half an hour to become an inferno.

“Now we leave.....At a sensible speed.” Said Eugenie.

“Yes, Mi’lady.”

That she couldn’t let him get away with. There was a friendly play fight and a lot of laughter. It seemed strange to be laughing near a burning car. They were at their car, when Eugenie noticed Lol had the gun from the BMW’s glove box. There it was, shoved down the belt on his jeans.

“You brought the gun.....I had intended to leave it there.” She said.

“I can always wipe it and throw it into a ditch.”

“No....Keep it.....It might turn out to be useful.” She said. “If Ruby gets angry, I’ll tell her it was your idea.”

“Oh, Eugenie.....You Stooly.”

They were at least half a mile from the wrecked car and the two bodies inside it. Eugenie looked out of the rear window and saw a column of black smoke, rising high up into the sky.

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Ruby had wanted to arrive at the dig site far sooner, though she accepted they might have arrived a lot later. Everything seemed to have gotten in the way of them getting on the bus and driving up into the mountains. Lily’s new tattoo of a wyvern was still only about a third completed and she was at the screeching stage if anyone asked to see it. As for Eugenie and Lorenzo.....The CIA seemed quite

pleased to hear about there being two less members of The Colonel's cult. Liam was safely in the hands of DINI and the Lima police, so Ruby had ordered everyone to get ready to get on board their yellow bus with red stripes. Bags had been packed, yet reasons not to get started on the journey, seemed to be almost put in their way by a malevolent deity. Despite giving a fierce talk about not being a democracy, Ruby was still surprised when their bus had left Lima, with everyone on it. "I think it was just inertia." She'd told George over the phone. "After so long in Huancayo, everyone wanted a little tourist time in Lima. Plus, Lily wants a tattoo that will take weeks to complete." There had been a lot of gossip from George, including Abe being signed up as for a trainee role at the Polandrous Foundation. Monique had probably realised it was not only a good move for Abe, but while he was training with George, he made a pretty good bodyguard too. Ruby was currently looking at the mountains in the light of late afternoon.

"There.....I can see their vehicles." Said Lily. "Finding this place would have been a nightmare, without their GPS coordinates."

Not that the bus had GPS, they were lucky it wasn't running on steam considering its age. Sophie had joked about it having two hundred previous owners, which was too accurate to be funny. It was old and ran hot on steep gradients, but the old bus had got them there. Their use of GPS was through a handheld device little larger than a cell phone.

"I can see people waving." Said Spider. "Always nice to arrive somewhere they're happy to see us."

"I just want something to eat and an early night." Said Lily.

Driving pulled on her new tattoo, though Lily had refused to get out of the driver's seat. She was driving there and Todd was driving them back. Lily wasn't going have it any other way, even if it killed her.

"Do they know some of us will be sleeping on the bus?" Asked Sarah.

"Yes....Ellie doesn't mind where we sleep." Said Ruby.

"Under canvas in a part of the world with spiders the size of dinner plates." Said Spider. "Definitely not for us, we're staying on old faithful."

"Oh, thank you for that, Spider." Said Sophie. "Now I'll be up all night, looking for bugs."

"Bugs don't scare me." Said Cal. "Well.....Not that much."

"Don't scare everyone, Spider." Said Ruby. "There isn't room for everyone to sleep on the bus, not comfortably."

Tents in what was effectively a miniature rainforest. Of course a huge variety of bugs were going to become unwanted visitors to their tents, it was unavoidable. Not that Ruby wanted them to realise that, until they'd all settled into a night time routine. After their bus had crunched over the gravelled car park area and come to a halt, Ellie Nicholas was there to meet them.

"Ruby.....The new trailers arrived and they're hooked up to the generator." Said Ellie. "They're really nice, so none of your group will need to sleep under canvas. Unless of course, they want to."

There was a huge cheer; even Todd looked far more cheerful. Ruby felt relieved too.....Spiders as big as dinner plates had rattled her enthusiasm for life under canvas.

"Thank you Ellie." Said Ruby. "I think you've just made a lot of people, very happy."

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