

Ruby V : Machu Picchu

Chapter 1 – A Hiking Holiday

“There are going to be times when you can't wait for somebody. Now you're either on the bus or off the bus.” - Tom Wolfe, The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test

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It was their last night in her Hackney flat for a while. Bags were packed, dishes washed and Cal was going to look after the place, water the plants and make sure Constanze was fed and looked after. Cal was already there, in the spare bedroom. She'd arrived in need of a place to stay, after her brother had been arrested in Sweden. Abe had fallen in with a bad crowd, but Ruby didn't consider it her job to get him out of jail. The wunderkinds weren't kids anymore, any of them. Sometimes, people had to accept their bad behaviour could lead to unpleasant consequences. Angie downstairs had been fine with not looking after the cat while she was away. In fact, her neighbour had been giving her a definite 'put upon' attitude since Ruby had arrived home.

“I love Constanze, but she scratched at the furniture.” Angie had said, plus many other similar comments.

Cal had arrived at the perfect moment and Constanze could be looked after in her own home. Just a few hours away from a direct flight from Heathrow to Jorge Chavez International Airport, the main airport for Lima. Todd was asleep, lying next to her. Ruby had that nagging feeling though, the one she often had before leaving home. Had she forgotten something crucial? Despite it just being a vacation, the feeling was keeping her awake. Nothing ever seemed to disturb Todd, he could sleep through thunderstorms. Ruby got up and put on a gown, just in case Cal was suffering from insomnia too. Into the kitchen, to get a glass of water and take a good look at her street.

“I'll miss you, Hackney.” She muttered. “Even the graffiti and stoned creeps in the corner shop.” Ruby knew she'd even miss the funky smell on the landing outside her flat. No point in asking the landlord to fix it. None of the other tenants knew it, but Ruby was their landlord, she owned the building. Through an offshore intermediary of course. Not that Ruby had anything against paying tax. It was just that her money wasn't always earned legally. Actually, very little of her personal fortune, had been earned by methods she'd like to be made public.

“Hey.....Don't claw my sofa while I'm away.....Ok?”

Constanze had climbed up onto the kitchen units, another of her antisocial habits. She was purring, loudly, as Ruby rubbed her ears and scratched her head. Did her cat miss her real owner? Kallina had owned Constanze for hundreds of years, after accidentally making her immortal. Maybe not totally immortal, Kallina was never sure. The large grey cat was definitely very old though, at least one hundred and eighty years old. At least the cat hadn't died when her owner had died. Ruby had been a bit worried that the immortality spell might die with the witch who'd cast it.

“You look fine to me, Constanze.” Said Ruby.

She might well outlive every living thing on the planet, but Ruby was sure her furry friend was just a cat. Deep down, where it mattered, Constanze wasn't full of ancient wisdom or powers. She was just an ordinary moggie with many years of eating tuna to look forward to. She'd be happy with any owner who kept her warm, fed her and petted her on demand.

“Do you know Baba Yaga has gone?” Ruby asked.

Nothing, just more purring and offering her head up to be petted. Ruby had often thought people could learn a lot from cats. No regrets, little anxiety.....They lived for the moment.

“You’ll like Cal, I’m certain.”

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Spider, also known as Rupert Bailey, liked the new relaxed Ruby. When it came to travel, she used to over organise them. Micromanage was the word Sophie often used. For this holiday, things were already different. Ruby had rented a large house, or she’d been loaned it. It belonged to a friend of Malou’s, a lady who was currently touring Southern Europe. The house was called Alessia House, a large place, built by one of the families who’d become rich from copper mining in Peru. It was in the Miraflores district, where the rich and beautiful lived. Not that Spider or Sarah had been there, though they had seen pictures.

“Get here before the fifteenth of May.” Ruby had told them. “I want to begin travelling around the countryside around then.”

No booking hotels, no trying to all get on the same plane, or avoid all getting on the same plane. No problem with him using a passport that wasn’t in his real name. Just get on a plane and arrive before the fifteenth, easy-peasy. The airport was quite a way from Lima, but nothing compared to the distance Heathrow was from Central London.

“Get a taxi from the airport, but they double the fare if you mention Miraflores.” Ruby had said.

Luckily Sarah was fluent in Spanish and had memorised the address. Actually, Sarah was fluent in a staggering number of languages, including a few dead ones. It was something to do with how her brain worked. She’d also managed to code and build the website for her translation business.

“Lima is beautiful.” Said Sarah. “Even if the taxi fare costs us a fortune.”

There was a meter with numbers that kept increasing, though neither of them understood what the numbers meant. Spider had brought the local currency, Sols. He’d also brought a wedge of US dollars. He had a firm belief, reinforced by experience, that no one in the world ever refuses to be paid in American dollars.

“We can afford it.....We’re on holiday.” Said Spider.

When their taxi turned south, the entire vibe of the city changed. It was as if someone had decided these were the streets where the wealthy would congregate. Wonderfully clean, as though people were employed to Hoover the streets at night.

“Wow, this beats.....Actually it beats just about everywhere.” Said Sarah.

They turned left after going past a large hotel and the taxi pulled up about fifty yards along the street. The house was a nice mixture of old and new architecture, with a small park just the other side of the road. A large building, the house had three floors and went back quite a way from the street.

“Just the sort of place I want when we retire.” Said Spider.

“We ! Who says I’ll put up with you for that long ?” Said Sarah.

The taxi fare was expensive, but not too bad. There is that thing though, where you only understand the local currency, when it’s time to get on the plane home. The taxi driver helped them get their bags out of the back and there they were. Stood in front of the house, next to a pile of bags, cases and carriers full of duty-free booze. Spider still had a nagging feeling that they could have bought the booze cheaper in Lima.

“I hope we’re at the right house.” Said Spider.

“It is, I just saw Todd look out of a window.”

A warm day in Lima, though not too warm. Probably around twenty-two degrees. Stood there in the morning sunshine, Spider began to feel a little hot and sticky. Ruby came to the door with Lily, who was now a mixture of road manager, PA and security consultant.

"You're here and you found me." Said Ruby. "Come in.....Here, let me get that bag."

Todd arrived wearing shorts and a plain white T shirt. He looked as though they'd disturbed him in the middle of a tennis match. Spider was never quite sure what to make of Todd. Ruby's live in lover now, he'd been around long enough to become a fixture. Todd was still a serving soldier though, even if he did seem to take a lot of time off. Anyone who was officially in the British army, tended to worry Spider. They were part of the authorities and only a short distance from being cops. Spider kept wondering if Todd would ask to see his passport.

"Leave the bags in the hall.....I'll take them upstairs." Said Todd.

A terrific guy was Todd, Spider would never hear a word against him. While Todd grappled with their bags, Ruby and Lily took them into a large and airy lounge.

"Oh, this house is gorgeous." Said Sarah.

"And it's mine until the end of September." Said Ruby. "More privacy than a hotel, we can come and go as we please."

"Who else is joining us ?" Asked Spider.

"I'll get us all some drinks.....Coffee alright ?" Asked Lily. "Sit.....You're all making the place look untidy."

There probably was aircon, though Ruby had obviously decided it wasn't that hot out. All the windows were opened and the glass doors that gave access to the garden. Spider did as he was told and sat on a very comfortable sofa.

"This.....Is all so much nicer than a hotel." He said.

"We can eat out in the evening, or order food to be delivered." Said Ruby. "We'll all need to do a turn at cooking breakfast. I seem to remember your fry-ups, Spider. It's been a while since I had one of those."

"Does a great army fry-up, does my Spider." Said Sarah. "Food that sticks to your ribs."

"I can cook scrambled eggs.....That's it, just a passable plate of scrambled eggs." Said Lily.

Lily brought coffee and nibbles and Spider had forgotten his question, until Sarah mentioned it.

"How many of us will there be ?" Asked Sarah. "Did you persuade Sophie to come ?"

Poor Sophie, they all knew how she'd blamed herself for Kallina dying. If she'd been there, if she hadn't taken them all to the Norwegian civil defence base. All nonsense of course, though Sophie had driven herself crazy with all the what ifs. Everyone missed Baba Yaga, but Sophie had grieved the most.

"Yes, Sophie should be here tomorrow." Said Ruby. "I'm not saying we need to walk on egg shells, but.....Be a little gentle with Sophie, for a while."

"Poor little Sophie." Spider muttered.

Todd arrived back, looking cool, calm and as though once again, he'd been playing tennis. Spider was definitely beginning to get a thing about his own fitness, since hitting his fortieth birthday. All those bags up all those stairs, on his own. Spider knew he'd be covered in sweat and breathing hard.

"Did you put them in the magnolia room ?" Asked Ruby.

"Yes, right across from Caleb, when he gets here." Said Todd.

"What's he like now ?" Asked Sarah. "Did Kallina's nice guy spells wear off ?"

"Hard to tell, he's always been a bit abrasive." Said Lily.

"Let's be honest about it, the guy is weirder than ever." Said Todd.

“Oh....Crap !” Said Sarah.

Ruby had that look on her face, the stern face. It was the face she usually put on, before the we’re not a democracy speech. It was her giving orders face, but they were all on vacation. Maybe she remembered that....Her expression did soften.

“Caleb knows about the terrorist group operating out of Lima.” Said Ruby. “Yes, we are all here on a hiking holiday. But, if we can do something about the terrorists.....We might as well, as we’re here. So, be nice to Caleb and try hard to ignore his.....Unfortunate personality.”

“He’ll be here this afternoon.” Added Lily.

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Mara had seen the numbers and she’d still had trouble believing them. Gérard Villand had made serious money out of the destruction of Gallaan Industries. The Russians had paid him for information, as had the CIA and British intelligence. Then there were all those wonderful financial derivatives. Effectively, Villand had bet on the indestructible Gallaan corporate conglomerate, failing. Shorting it was called, betting on a company’s shares falling in price. When Gallaan ceased to be listed on the stock exchange, Villand had shared a bottle of champagne with her. Times were good for the Villand extended family of homeless kids and misfits. Not that they ever worked for free. Malou was paying for their services, now that Ruby was taking a long vacation. No going through the reception desk. Mara walked across the lobby and sat at Malou’s table.

“Breakfast, you must have breakfast.” Said Malou. “Girls today.....You’re all too skinny.”

“Eggs.....I wouldn’t mind some eggs.” Said Mara.

Malou called over a waiter and ordered Eggs Benedict, which meant nothing to her. Expensive food in a famous Parisienne hotel.....It was bound to taste wonderful.

“Have you heard from her ?” Asked Malou.

No need to ask who, Ruby Mason had monopolised their conversations since she’d left for Lima.

“You know Villand and phones, or any other technology invented since the great war. Ruby has called me twice at home, both times quite late at night.” Said Mara. “She’s fine and Sophie will be joining her. She did ask about you and the hotel.”

An attack of some kind on the hotel was unlikely. Mara was quite happy to provide discreet security though and general surveillance, for a price. She knew her trade and if anyone was watching the hotel, they had to be invisible, or a ghost.

“Did she say if Sophie was feeling better ?” Asked Malou.

“No, just that she was joining her in Peru.”

Poor Sophie, everyone was concerned. Mara had suffered from depression once and it had taken her a long time to shake it off.

“How has Charlotte handled.....Everything ?” Asked Mara.

“I think she bottles things up.” Said Malou. “On the surface Charlie is fine. George has taken her shopping, for new shoes. I can’t get him within miles of a clothes shop. Charlie though....He treats her like a long-lost daughter. Still....I think she needs some friendly faces, after.....You know.”

Mara didn’t, not really and definitely not the details. She just knew there’d been a dreadful battle, somewhere in Norway. Several deaths among those close to Ruby, actually, quite a few deaths.

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Caleb Friedman was twenty four, though recent experiences had left him looking a good five years older than that. He was on so many watchlists, that travelling under his own name was guaranteed to lead to his arrest and incarceration. Luckily, events in Norway had changed his physical appearance. Hardened features and a nasty scar, right across his left cheek. If anyone was trying to

match him to his old photographs, they weren't going to have much luck. Even his eyes seemed a darker brown now, though he accepted that his memory might be faulty.

"Faulty memory.....You asshole." He muttered.

He was travelling on a KLM flight into Lima, a connecting flight from La Paz in Bolivia. Experience had taught Caleb that paranoia can save your life, if they really are out to get you. There had been a lot of connecting flights, under several different names. The woman in the seat next to him was wary of his muttering. She was looking at him again. Too worried and she might talk to the cabin crew, who might talk to the pilot, who might make a call to someone.....

"Sorry.....It's the travel sickness pills." He said. "I can't travel without them, but I get a bit freaky when I'm on them.....Sorry."

Caleb had plenty of charm, when he needed to use it. He was quite good looking, even with the scar. Sometimes, in the mirror, he thought the scar was actually an asset. It hinted at things dark and mysterious. He'd given the woman a rational explanation for his behaviour and, as he'd planned, he had to appear a little vulnerable.

"Oh dear, I get so nauseous on those things." Said the woman. "I think I.....Have some pain killers in my bag. Would they help?"

He was suffering and she was nice. Her hand even briefly touched his, as she handed him a couple of paracetamols. He'd give her the name on his fake passport and she'd tell him her name and everything about herself. Enough private data to clone her life, if he was into that kind of thing, which he wasn't. They'd probably arrange to meet in Lima one evening, though he wouldn't show up. The important thing was that the woman next to him was now an ally, rather than a liability.

"I'm Richard by the way." He said.

"Tricia.....I'm Tricia."

It would be fun going through his false ID in horrendous detail. No harm would come to Tricia. He'd just keep her entertained until the plane landed in Lima. The important thing was knowing what was his real life and what were fakes, implanted memories. For a large amount of his adult life, Caleb hadn't known what fragments of his memories were real, or false. That had all been corrected by a lot of witchcraft, women with strange gifts and a fair amount of good luck.

"Are you travelling to Lima for business?" Asked Tricia.

"And some pleasure.....I hope there's time to relax."

There was a certain look he recognised, a way of smiling. Tricia would definitely try to arrange to meet him before the plane landed. No asking her if she was married of course, even though she was wearing a ring. That would spoil things.

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Sophie had come via New York, though not because she was worried about being on any law enforcement watchlists. In New York she'd spent a day with Eugenie and Lorenzo, who'd already been there for one week, of a two-week vacation. It seemed everyone had decided that May was the perfect month for vacations. Of course the subject had to come up, as Eugenie had spent months living in Olga's mansion. How was Olga? There was some worry about how she'd react to losing her brother, Alexander.

"I've spoken to Nadia a few times." Eugenie had said. "They go way back, right to when Olga was running contraband for Jurgis. It seems Olga never left her bedroom for a few days, but she's now fine. You know Olga.....She always bounces back."

"We're going to stop over in Budapest on the way home." Lorenzo had added. "Just to make sure she's alright.....She'll be fine, tough as old boots."

Sophie thought the same, Olga was the kind of lady who survived everything and came out of it with a grin on her face. Tough as old boots though....She really wouldn't have appreciated that description.

Eugenie still had her connections in Milan. Ruby had always called it the cartel, though they were more into organised crime than drugs. Illegal gambling, loan sharking and a huge amount of general corruption. It was said no office block was built in Milan, without the cartel getting some kind of kickback. Not an organisation Ruby was happy about, but Eugenie was a grown woman. Close to being two hundred years old, despite looking no more than twenty four, twenty five at the most. Sophie received her current fake ID, while in New York. Sophie might not approve of the cartel, but Eugenie could obtain just about anything.....When in Rome and all that.

"Passport, American of course." Eugenie had said. "Driving licence and a prepaid debit card in the same name. They'll all withstand quite a lot of scrutiny, as long as you avoid getting picked up by the FBI."

"I'll do best.....What the hell.....I'm Kendra now, Kendra Hunter."

"Hey, I picked that....I thought it sounded cool." Eugenie had said.

"Yeah, if I was a TikTok influencer.....How much is on the card?"

"Five thousand dollars, as you asked."

"Fine."

There had been the usual quick sightseeing and a really great evening with the two love birds. Ruby had thought marriage was on the cards for Eugenie and Lorenzo, though there was no sign of it happening anytime soon.

Sophie was currently travelling as Kendra, on a direct Delta Airlines night flight from New York to Lima. Not a cheap airline, but the flight was closest to her ideal time to arrive in Peru. An eight-hour flight and she wasn't feeling at all sleepy. Sophie would never admit to being an introvert, despite being aware of it for a very long time. It came and went in waves, with the occasional period where she was the life and soul of the party. It had to be one of those times. Sophie began to take an interest in the other passengers, especially the man just across the aisle. She got out of her seat and crouched in the aisle, her face inches from his. A minus ten for stealth of course and not a way to be the woman on the flight, who no one would remember. Sophie had gifts of course and one of those was a low level 'ignore me, I'm not a problem,' aura. None of the passengers would notice her, except him. None of the cabin staff would acknowledge her presence, but he'd notice her.

"Excuse me." She whispered, right up against his ear.

He'd bumped into her once and they had shared a smile at one another, twice. There had been no deep delving into his mind, she liked to be surprised by people. Digging deep into a mind took away any surprises and ruined spontaneity. He liked the look of her though, she'd picked that up. The guy in the jeans, gawdy shirt and expensive sneakers, was definitely interested in her. He had a slight resemblance to Harry Styles, though she wasn't going to hold that against him. He turned and looked at her.

"Yes?"

"I'd like you to join me in the bathroom.....The one over there." Said Sophie.

Toilet was one of the words she rarely used, though she had no idea why she found it offensive. By pointing, there'd be no doubt about where she meant. He took a good look around, which she took as a good sign. He was obviously taking her seriously and looking for anyone awake enough to spot them using the bathroom, together. A tiny red-haired girl crouched next to him. The question didn't surprise her, she'd been asked it before.

“How old are you?”

Tempting to show him proof that she was twenty three year old Kendra. He'd need a light on to see her passport and by then, the couple in the adjoining seats, would be wide awake. Sophie gave him a tiny bit of her extra special smile. Not enough to have any long-lasting effect, but enough to make him relax.

“I'm old enough.....Now, are you joining me?” She asked.

“Yes.”

He looked around a lot, but it wasn't far. Once inside the bathroom, he relaxed. It was the toilet really, no bath in sight. Ideally airlines would call them the rooms with blue water, that sounded cool. Toilet was on her list though, of her fifty most hated words. Right up there at number two, just below functionality. He kissed her and Sophie kissed him back, with enthusiasm.

“I'm Tom.”

“Kendra.”

Her skirt went up around her waist, as he unzipped and dropped his jeans. Not the most romantic thing in the world, but there wasn't time for the obligatory thirty-six questions and a bottle of merlot. Sophie pulled her panties to one side and leant back against the wash basin. She'd had no intention of having sex on the aircraft, but as he entered her.....It was wonderful, but then again, it had been a while. The thrusting felt good, Tom was getting in really deep. All too soon it was over and Sophie was wiping between her legs with tissue paper. Another kiss of course, it was polite. After tidying herself up, she opened the door to the room with blue water.

“Give me five minutes....Then come out.” She said.

Good, no asking to see her again or sudden protestations of love. Sophie went back to her seat, feeling far more relaxed than when she'd left it. After no more than three or four minutes, she fell asleep.

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Ruby slept well in Alessia House; the warm climate suited her. There were cleaners during the day and an outside gardening company. They could be watched and monitored and putting up with a slight lack of privacy, was preferably to living in a grubby house with an overgrown garden. One thing Ruby had insisted on though, was only her and her friends, were to be in the property at night. Useful for security, but it meant there was no one to open the door at strange hours, such as half past three in the morning.

“Oh, damn.” Ruby muttered.

Normally Todd slept through anything, but unlike her, he wasn't sleeping too well in their temporary home. He was putting it all down to a strange bed in a city he didn't know. It meant he was awake, before her feet touched the rug on her side of the bed.

“What is it?” He asked.

“Just Sophie arriving early, I'll go and let her in.”

It had been a kind of alarm beep on their mental link, like a telepathic wassup. Ruby had heard it and sent another wassup in reply. It wasn't sophisticated, but it worked. No getting fully dressed, it was only Sophie after all. Ruby put on Todd's discarded shirt and did up most of the buttons.

“That'll do.” She mumbled.

“Say hi, from me.” Said Todd.

“Fine....Whatever.”

How could he be so damn cheery in the middle of the night. Ruby left their bedroom, her bare feet making a slapping sound against the wooden floor. Slippers hadn't seemed essential and hers were still next to her bed, in Hackney.

"At least Sophie is the last to arrive." She muttered.

Caleb had arrived the previous day. He'd come via connections through just about every airline hub on the planet. Listening to him it had sounded sensible, a good way to cover his tracks. Was it though, or was he a paranoid loony. At half three in the morning, with cold feet and a slight headache, she wasn't sure. The usual way to decide was if anyone tried to track Caleb down. If a man with a gun and evil intent turned up, Caleb wasn't being paranoid.

All that thinking about paranoia had probably affected her, still only half-awake brain. Ruby could feel Sophie just outside the door, but she felt for other minds. She found no alert and curious mind anywhere even vaguely close to the house. Ruby opened the door.

"So, young lady....What time do you call this ?" Asked Ruby. "That's it.....You're grounded, for a month."

"You're crazy."

Two of those tough looking cases with wheels and handles and Sophie had a bag over her shoulder. Ruby grabbed one of the cases and left the other for Sophie. The girl could bench press six hundred pounds with ease, so a case and a bag wouldn't kill her.

"The lady who owns the place is into plants." Said Ruby. "I've put you in the amaryllis room."

"Are the others here ?"

"Yes, you're the last."

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Sarah had bought a digital SLR camera for their holiday. There hadn't been a chance to take pictures in Africa or Norway, they'd been too busy trying to stay alive. Now though, it was a proper vacation, even if Ruby was hoping to deal with a terrorist threat. The others would probably use their phones, but Sarah had wanted to bring a proper camera, with heaps of spare memory cards. Her new camera did a zillion and one things she'd never need, but it took brilliant pictures.

"Stop dreaming, Ruby wants us all on time for breakfast." Said Spider.

"I'm not dreaming."

"So..... You intended to wear those socks ?" Asked Spider.

The weather forecast was sunshine and a high of twenty-two. Sarah had put on a skirt that ended an inch above her knees. Looking down she had a perfect view of her legs. She considered them to be just about perfect, but her socks weren't. One was a dark tartan and the other plain grey.

"Oh, who has time to match up socks." She muttered.

The socks could remain odd for the entire day, she was on holiday. She picked up her journal, which was a new thing. It was an artificially old looking book, with a leather cover. Spiral bound, she'd seen it online and fallen in love with it. Ruby had kept a journal in Africa, complete with doodles, drawings and even a map or two. Sarah had decided to create a journal of their Peru adventure. So far, her journal had just an entry for arriving in Lima and two pencil sketches of Spider. Neither was a masterpiece, but he had recognised his likeness, so they couldn't be that bad.

"Sarah.....I need my coffee." Said Spider.

"I refuse to be hurried.....We're on holiday."

She did hurry a little bit, people being late was one of Ruby's things. It was a vacation, but Ruby was still, very much in charge. Sarah followed Spider out of their room and down the stairs. Not the last to arrive for breakfast, they found Sophie with the front door open, surveying the street.

“Our transport has arrived, the guy just delivered it.” Said Sophie. “I’m not sure if I like it, but it definitely shouts vacation at you.”

Spider had his head around the door before her.

“It’s a bus.....A minibus.” He said.

Not canary yellow, though it was quite bright. There were red painted strips up the front and along the sides. Not a new vehicle, though it had a solid and dependable look. Sarah thought that if you were trying to look like a touring gang of hippies, it was just about perfect.

“I like it, we can all travel together.” Said Sarah. “And there’s plenty of room for our kit.”

“What kit ?” Asked Spider.

“I agree with Sarah, we always end up with lots of kit.” Said Sophie.

“You’re either on the bus or off the bus.” Muttered Spider.

“Who said that ?” Asked Sarah. “I recognise that from somewhere.”

“No idea, but I’ll now be trying to remember that.....All day.” Said Spider.

Sarah was determined to be normal with Sophie, no treating her as if she was fragile, or likely to burst into tears. That definitely wasn’t the Sophie she knew. There had been several running jokes about Sophie being tiny. Most had been abandoned because everyone had heard them, so many times. Sarah decided to resurrect one of the oldest.

“Wow Sophie, I think you’ve grown since I last saw you.”

Spider audibly gulped, while Sophie smiled at her. Sarah moved in and hugged Sophie, actually kissing the top of her head. Sophie always used shampoo with an unusual scent, or washed her hair with hand soap. Her hair smelled of lemons, with a trace of sandalwood. For a second or so it was like hugging a plank of wood. It was a huge relief when Sophie hugged her back.

“Please.....Please.” Said Spider. “I need my coffee.”

Todd had volunteered to make breakfast that morning, which could be good, or bad. He’d often made breakfast in Africa and there had been a few really bad mornings. If the wonderful aromas in the dining room were any guide, Todd had created something beyond simply edible.

“Our bus has arrived.” Sophie announced.

“Good, we’ll blend in nicely.” Said Ruby. “Come on you three.....Help yourselves to food and the coffee has just been made.”

Her camera was over her shoulder and Sarah couldn’t resist. She stepped back a few paces to get everyone in and flipped up the flash on her camera. As she turned the camera on, Ruby had obviously noticed.

“Not over breakfast.” Said Ruby. “My hair is all over the place.”

Sarah took no notice and took the shot. When she checked the small screen, the picture looked perfect. Spider had brought her plate over, as well as his own. Fried bread and a pile of scrambled eggs. After sipping a cup of excellent coffee, she added a note to her journal.

‘Ruby, Todd, Caleb, Sophie, Spider and me.....We’re all in Lima. And Lily must be here too, somewhere.’

“Where is Lily ?” Asked Sarah.

“Making phone calls and arranging our day.” Said Ruby. “We must save her some food.”

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