

## Ruby V : Machu Picchu

### Chapter 12 – Another Fourteen Hours

**“The helicopter had made one pass over the cabins; a second might make the targets bolt. The FBI had a lot of agents on the ground and a few local cops. Add on some armed operatives from Homeland and there was a lot of firepower among the trees in that West Virginian wood.”**

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Todd moaned about leaving Huancayo a little early, but there had been three days in Paris. Ruby had been a little surprised when the reception desk had asked if her party were still leaving the hotel the following morning. The time had flown by, though she still hadn't seen even a tiny number of the touristy places she'd hoped to see. As was normal, or so she'd been told, the High Andes train back to Lima, was fully booked. Or at least fully booked until Ruby had offered the right price. Then it had been quite easy to obtain tickets for Cal, Eugenie and Lorenzo. Strange to be returning to Lima with more people than on the outward journey. As strange events went on her trips though, that was quite a minor one. Hotel bills had been paid and Liam's lodgings arranged with the local DINI office. At a seemingly ludicrously early hour, Ruby found herself counting her luggage, as everyone got settled on the train.

“We had four cases, now we've five.” Said Todd. “I seem to remember us both buying quite a few new clothes and several souvenirs.”

“Shusshh....Leave me to my foibles, it's an old Mason family tradition.” Muttered Ruby.

She counted the cases and there were five, plus a bag that went over her shoulder. Ruby had memories about the people who'd adopted her, though to her they'd always been mum and dad. Her dad had insisted on counting cases when they left where they'd been on holiday, usually a cheap boarding house on the English coast. It seemed there'd once been a missing case, when they'd returned on the coach from Skegness one year. Always mildly OCD, her dad had begun a family ritual.....Always count the bags and cases.

“Yep, five.” She said. “Now you can put them on the rack and anywhere else they can be jammed into.”

“It feels different going back.” Said Todd. “We know the food is good.....Which takes a bit of danger and excitement out of the journey.”

“Idiot.”

A kiss became a friendly tussle, which.....Might have become more if the train hadn't been full. Ruby had decided to ask Sophie about how expensive it was to hire one of the kitchen store rooms as a trysting place. Sophie had been right; it was only fourteen hours without sex. But, it was a bit like prohibition, or so she imagined. Once something was generally unavailable, it became the one thing in the world you had to have.

“Sarah and Spider, said the ladies toilets are quite nice.” Said Todd.

“Hey, we've only just got on the train.” Said Ruby. “Don't worry.....I'll arrange something for this evening.”

Ruby swapped seats with Todd. From her new angle she could just about see where Cal was sat. Their newest wunderkind seemed remarkably relaxed and confident with her new special gifts. To

Ruby it felt a little like handing the nuclear codes to a sixth former with an hormonal imbalance. Still, what's done is done and there was no way of removing Kallina's gift to the girl.

"Stop staring.....She isn't likely to explode." Said Todd.

"Oh, I didn't mean to be that obvious." Said Ruby. "She's actually handling it all very well. Perhaps too well, she appeared to get on quite well with Liam. I'd have been happier if she'd been a bit scared of him, or showed some other strong emotions. I get a feeling she's a dormant volcano, waiting to go boom."

"You must have once been like her.....You've turned out alright." Said Todd.

"It took me years to unlock every gift inside me. Cal has got the lot.....All working and some based on pure witchcraft. You'll need to let me get a bit neurotic about it."

"You know what would settle you down a bit?" Asked Todd.

Todd always denied smirking, yet there it was on his face, the smirk to beat all other smirks. She knew what he meant and for any sane person, it was so early in the morning that it was still night time.

"Alright.....Let's explore the ladies bathroom." Said Ruby.

"Sophie will tell you off for saying that." Said Todd.

"Why?"

"There's no bath in there."

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The information Ruby gave the CIA was pure gold. It had to be acted on quickly, or the religious cult near Two Pines Lake might vanish as quick as morning mist. The CIA weren't allowed to operate on American soil, so they dutifully passed the gold to Homeland Security, who then enlisted the FBI to get the job done. It might take a year to sort out a query on your tax return, but mention terrorists and the wheels move a lot quicker.....

The helicopter had made one pass over the cabins; a second might make the targets bolt. The FBI had a lot of agents on the ground and a few local cops. Add on some armed operatives from Homeland and there was a lot of firepower among the trees in that West Virginian wood. Still, the cult members would know the area better than them, and there was a chance they'd escape. Not all of them maybe, but some of them dead and the others gone.....It would make unpleasant reading in the West Virginia Daily News. When the information came in, it came in as silent text on the device Reynolds was holding.

"Well?" Asked FBI Agent, John Wyman.

"Not a good night for infra-red, too humid." Said Reynolds. "There looks to be about a dozen of them in the cabins. Spread around and active.....They're obviously not early to bed kind of people." No being flown in on an FBI Gulfstream, that tended to only happen in movies. Wyman was leading the operation because he was the senior man in the closest FBI office. Speed mattered and as he'd told his wife before leaving home.

"I definitely got the job because of proximity."

No telling her he might not be home for a day or so, she'd heard that a few times before. His wife of five years had already had the call to say he was in hospital. That bullet wound had gained him a decoration he'd probably never get the chance to wear. Not that the commendation would have played a part in him getting the current assignment near Two Pines Lake. He was just the closest guy with the right experience.

"Alright, everyone knows where to go." Said Wyman. "Give the command, we're going in."

"What do we do with the local cops?" Asked Reynolds.

“Keep them on the perimeter as backup.”

Wyman liked cops shows on TV and most of the movies about the FBI. There was a lot of jargon on TV, about ‘extraction’ and ‘insertion.’ He’d seen the real thing, actually he’d seen it a bit too often. All he’d ever heard was what Reynolds was currently saying on their comms.

“All teams.....We’re going in.”

Homeland would issue their own command about a minute later; it was what they tended to do. They had a certain vibe, though they’d be there if it turned into a full on firefight. Usually though, it was the FBI who went in first and handled the situation. With Reynold to his right, Wyman ran towards the large main cabin near the lake.

“They’re asking.” Hissed Reynolds. “Do we want the copter to make another run?”

“No.”

Strange thoughts tend to arrive at moments of stress. Wyman was worried about eating a meal not that long ago. That could be bad news if they had to dig a bullet out of him. He also wondered why senior people carried a handgun during an operation, while most of the people in FBI jackets, had assault rifles up and ready. Wyman loved the standard issue Glock, but there were times when he’d have loved to be carrying something with a bit more firepower. An Uzi would have been nice, even if it wasn’t exactly standard issue. They briefly stopped at the cabin door.

Reynolds did a silent countdown on his fingers, from three to one. At one, Agent Graves used the heel of her boot on the door. Operations still tended to be a male thing, but Graves was tough.

Wyman knew her of course, he knew them all. He’d even had a Christmas drink with most of them. That was mostly a good thing, as long as everyone went home after they’d dealt with the bad guys. Graves shouted as they entered the cabin.

“Armed FBI agents.....Down, down on the floor.”

Not by the book, though these things rarely went strictly by the book. Zinberg went through the door next to Graves. He was tall and wide, a real brick outhouse kind of build. There were two armed men in the cabin, but Graves and Zinberg knew how to deal with them. No yelling threats, or giving umpteen chances to behave, that too was just part of TV folklore. Two assault rifles fired and two cult members fell to the ground. The first blood on the carpet and neither of the dead men looked remotely like the man everyone seemed to want to talk too. His people knew that too of course, there had been a full description.

“Anyone tall, white and grey haired, should be taken alive, if possible.” Wyman had told them. “He’s got a grey beard too and I’m told.....A bit of a military look about him.”

A photograph of the Colonel would have been nice, though the description was very detailed. Right down to a slight limp on his left leg and a hint of a Kentucky accent. His team were well trained, they didn’t assume the guy coming through the cabin’s other door, was one of them. Good job, as the man in a black jacket, opened fire. Luckily both his shot went wide and Zinberg brought him down with two or three rounds in the chest. Wyman nodded at Zinberg.

“Well done.”

Unlikely the cultists would be wearing Kevlar and if they were.....If they didn’t bleed or tried to get up, you just shot them again, but in the head. Wyman had never seen that in the book either, but he was fine with anything that meant his people getting home in one piece.

“Dark hair.....Looks about thirty.” Said Reynolds. “Definitely not our guy.”

“Good, he’s no use to anyone if he’s dead.” Said Wyman.

It took a while to secure all the cabins and one of the Homeland people managed to catch a bullet. Somewhere in the abdomen, though the paramedics said he was likely to survive. At one point

someone thought there was a weird chemicals type smell in one of the cabins, so everyone was pulled out, while the bomb dogs went through the place. Some people became impatient, but Wyman was an experienced operative. He used the opportunity to read a little more of the intelligence sent through from Langley. He also managed to get nearly half an hour of sleep, before Reynolds told him there didn't seem to be any improvised explosive devices in any of the cabins. There was a safe built into a piece of furniture. Just the light type of safe, opened by a simple keypad. The kind beloved by cheap hotels and motels. It might have once held something useful, but someone had cleared it out. It was another hour, before Wyman had the captured cult members put in the back of a stereotypical black FBI SUV.

"Fourteen members of the cult, only four captured alive." Said Reynolds. "The others are in body bags and waiting for transportation to a hospital morgue.....Sadly, no sign of the elusive Colonel." No one had even reported seeing a tall military looking guy with grey hair. It wasn't a disaster; they did have four cultists in custody. Plus, once identified, the dead guys would have families who could be questioned. The cult did seem to be exclusively male, which wasn't a surprise. Probably all ex armed services personnel. With luck their military histories, might cross over somewhere. With even more luck, the Colonel might be there.....A cross over point in all their past army exploits. It couldn't be that easy though, could it ?

"Alright, send the numbers and bare bones report." Said Wyman.

Everyone was tired and they'd been shot at. Wyman was tempted to give the area a last very thorough search, but knew it was unlikely to turn up anything. The Colonel was gone, probably away through the trees after the first gunshot.

"We're finished for tonight, Reynolds." Said Wyman. "Tell everyone they can go home."

By the time the media relations people had worked on it, that night's events would be a fantastic victory for Federal law enforcement. Wyman stopped next to his car and sent a text to his wife. No details of course, just that he was on his way home.

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Eugenie couldn't decide if it was to help keep up the whole watching Ruby's back mission, or that she was feeling a bit antisocial. It was definitely less stuffy outside the train and the roof was flat and surprisingly comfortable. Grubby up there, so they'd brought a couple of blankets to sit on. No going hungry on the roof, they did have valid tickets and would claim at least two meals each, during the fourteen hour journey. Lorenzo, Lol to her and only her, seemed to be enjoying seeing the mountains from the roof of a High Andes train.....

"That's better, no wind in our faces." Said Lol. "And really.....No one can see us ?"

"It's complicated, a mixture of several special gifts." Said Eugenie. "A wind barrier is physical, but the 'ignoring us,' is pure mental manipulation. People's eyes can see us, but their brain doesn't register our presence. Sophie calls it her 'don't you worry about me,' spell. She once walked naked out of the bathroom on an airliner, got dressed at her seat....And no one noticed."

"Why was she.....Ahh, I've just understood that one." Said Lol. "Yes, we all know little Sophie, has her wild moments."

"Yes, our Sophie is all grown up.....She was born in eighteen ninety, or thereabouts."

Eugenie had used several of her gifts to keep them safe on the train roof and make them relatively invisible. Not just a windshield, there was a little alteration in momentum, just in case the train hurtled around a bend, or suddenly stopped, or speeded up. Complicated, but everything mostly looked after itself, once she'd set it up. There were high speed trains across the Andes, but theirs

was designed for tourism rather than speed. It wasn't likely to do anything her various gifts and spells couldn't cope with. Lol was pulling at her arm to get her attention.

"I'm pretty certain.....She can see us." He said, while pointing.

"Ahhh, Cal.....I'm glad she came to see us." Said Eugenie.

The girl was stood on the far end of the carriage roof and Eugenie had no idea where she'd appeared from. Getting into her mind was tough; the blocks were pretty good considering she was a newbie wunderkind. Cal actually opened her mind, to show her intentions.

"She wants me to help train her." Said Eugenie. "It seems Sophie has shown her a few things, but suggested she came to see me next."

"Hi, Cal." Lol shouted.

Eugenie beckoned Cal forward and was surprised at how sure footed she was. No putting her arms out, or taking it one careful step at a time. Cal walked confidently along the carriage, before sitting cross legged in front of them. Getting her jeans grubby didn't seem to worry the girl.

"I can sense you're upset, Cal." Said Eugenie. "Tell me how I can help?"

"The poor girl is sat on inches of dirt." Said Lol. "Can we at least give her one of our blankets?"

"Sorry, yes.....Of course." Said Eugenie.

No giving up one of theirs, Eugenie instantly had a large blanket in her hands, which she passed over to Cal. It wasn't just Cal who gasped, Lol seemed surprised too.

"Where did you get that from?" He asked.

"Today isn't the time or place to go into that." Said Eugenie. "I suspect Cal wants to discuss the famous guava I've heard about."

Poor Cal, the anxiety was coming off her in waves. Kallina had always taught them to be careful with summoning spells, even simple ones. Never summon anything you couldn't get rid of. Not that Eugenie remembered them using much pure witchcraft. Kallina never had mentioned recovering something you'd got rid of.....But wanted back.

"Yes, everyone is being nice, but I can tell they're worried." Said Cal. "I couldn't see it at first, though I can now. Supposing I'm practising and make a few hand gestures by mistake.....I might send someone to where I sent the guava."

"And you couldn't bring them back." Said Lol.

"Yes.....Ruby said I need to recover the guava." Said Cal. "If I can get it back, I think everyone will relax."

Changes to the physical world, altering reality to her will. Eugenie was good at it, though she suspected Cal might be better than her, one day. It was dangerous and there were cross overs with dark magic. At that moment though, for reasons more to do with helping a miserable looking girl, than anything else. Eugenie decided to train Cal, or at least be one of her trainers.

"Alright Cal, but for now.....I just want to reassure you a little." Said Eugenie. "No questions now, just watch and remember. The training and all the questions can wait until we're back in Lima. Firstly, a lady should always know where her brick is."

No gestures, no words, nothing to really test her abilities. Eugenie had used the brick routine to help train Abe and now she was using it to train his sister. A brick appeared in her right hand, which she juggled a couple of times to show it was an ordinary, quite heavy, orange coloured house brick. They were good, neither members of her audience asked questions.

"There are instructions for this brick. It's mainly space anyway, given the illusion of substance by billions of particles, which are also mainly space.....Alright, before you both drift off. I can change the instructions to do this."

Eugenie released the brick and it didn't fall. There it was, hanging in the air in a way bricks definitely weren't famous for. She could do so much more to that brick, but she just wanted to give Cal a very brief introduction to what was possible.

"Everything has instructions for the multiverse to follow." She said. "Huge sets of instructions that make the most complex computer programme, look like the jottings of a fool."

"How do you know all this?" Asked Cal. "Sorry, I know.....No questions."

"Just this once.....I was born a long time ago, Cal. Baba Yaga trained me along what she called the fault line of my natural abilities. I was born in Paris in around eighteen twenty and I've learned a lot since then. Now.....If I change a few of the other instructions for our humble house brick...."

The brick had gone and with luck, she'd sent it to the same place as the guava. There were other places though, some used by dark magic users. A few were the equivalent of oubliettes, magical dungeons where enemies were left to die. A tiny number of places were totally hostile to life and destroyed any life form arriving there. Eugenie had sent the brick to a place that wasn't nice, but it wasn't that bad either. It certainly wouldn't burn the guava to a crisp, or turn it into something unnatural.

"The brick can stay where it is.....But hopefully."

There was a place between worlds; some called it a kind of limbo. It had lots of names and sometimes it felt like every practitioner of magical arts, had their own name for it. Eugenie had been there a few times, expecting to find all the things people complained about inexplicably losing. It wasn't like that though, no mountain of lost ballpoint pens, no continent of mislaid coat hangers. There had been the wreck of a B52 bomber though, which was still a mystery. Not a place to store guava fruit though, so mentally finding Cal's wasn't that difficult.

"This must be yours." Said Eugenie.

The guava in her hand was soft, but not yet unpleasant to hold. A few dark patches, but the fruit was recognisable. Cal held out her hand and Eugenie dropped the fruit into it. Cal couldn't have looked happier if she'd won the lottery, three times in a row.

"That is amazing.....Where was it?" Asked Cal.

"A kind of limbo between worlds....There is no one name for it."

"Can I see it? Will you take me there?" Asked Cal.

Lol was giving her a certain look, the get the poor girl excited and you'll be looking after her for the rest of her life....Look. By all accounts her brother was a jerk and Cal had no one else, not really.

"First you become expert at bringing back what you send there." Said Eugenie. "When I'm pretty certain you could bring yourself back, I'll take you there. Does that sound fair?"

"It does.....I must show Ruby the guava." Said Cal. "She'll be so happy we got it back.....Well, that you got it back."

"Give it a few weeks and you'll be sending all sorts of things there, and bringing them back." Said Eugenie.

Guava jammed into a pocket, Cal was off down the carriage, before dropping down at the far end. Eugenie still wasn't sure if being a mentor was really her thing, but she was committed now. There was no way she was going to let Cal down. Lol was still giving her a certain look.

"I know.....I know, Lol." She said. "I'm daft and she'll probably end up moving in with us, as a permanent house guest."

"I'm not complaining, I thought she was being influenced far too much by.....Am I allowed to criticise Charlotte?"

"Oh yes, you criticise away.....Charlotte is definitely no longer the flavour of the month with Ruby."

“Good.....I think you’ll be a much better influence on Cal.” Said Lol.

“Thank you.”

They kissed and as it was unlikely Cal would be back, the kissing led to touching. Full on sex would have been nice, but it was just a little too cold to get fully naked.

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No pre-booked cabs, their arrival time in Lima could have easily varied by over an hour. That was part of the fun of the High Andes Railway, or so the booking office claimed. Everyone had left the train and headed for their own preferred way of finding a taxi. Todd had managed to find an air conditioned taxi, a large vehicle with plenty of room. Ruby had found Lily and Cal waiting at a taxi rank, and taken them with Todd and her. Cal was still excited over the guava she still had in her jacket pocket. Lily had something to enthuse about too.

“I’m definitely getting a wyvern tattoo, at the place we used last time.”

Ruby was just happy to see Alessia House again; the place was beginning to feel like home. Their old bus was still parked outside, which pleased her. Crime in Lima wasn’t that bad, but they now had a few enemies in Peru. Ruby wouldn’t totally relax until she’d made sure there had been no intruders in the house, while they’d been away.

“Ahh, Alessia House.....Our home away from home.” Said Todd.

“Is it nice ?” Asked Cal.

“Of course, you haven’t seen it before.” Said Lily. “Yes, it is nice.....Very nice.”

“You’ll get your own room, no sharing.” Said Ruby.

“Who has Constanze ?” Asked Cal.

“I gave her carrier to Sophie; I couldn’t find you when we left the train.” Said Ruby. “Of course, Constanze might be anywhere by now, that cat has a mind of her own.”

“No, I get the feeling she’ll stay with us.” Said Cal.

“I think that too.” Added Ruby. “Whatever Kallina passed on to you....I think Constanze was included.”

Sarah and Spider were already there, getting out of a cab. There was a quick wave, before they opened the front door and went inside. No screams, no shouting about damage where someone had broken in. There were a few staff about of course; they’d have been checking that everything was alright. Sophie was already in the house, she must have found a taxi driver who was willing to put their foot down, the pedal to the metal, as Sophie like to phrase it. No need for special gifts to know Sophie and Caleb were in the house. On the hall table was a large cat carrier, with a note on the side. ‘Someone needs to buy a litter tray – Soph.’

Sophie’s way of saying that bringing Constanze from the station, didn’t mean she was now responsible for the large grey cat. Luckily, Cal seemed happy to claim ownership of the feline sleeping in the carrier.

“Oh, dear Constanze....Can I keep her in my room ?” Asked Cal.

“Yes, but leave the door ajar. Give her the run of house.” Said Ruby.

“I will.....Actually; I don’t have a room yet.”

“There are pictures and names on the doors.” Said Ruby. “The rooms are named after flowering plants. You might as well claim the.....Orchid room. I’ll sort out sheets and things later on. For now, I know where the supermarket is. I’ll get some shopping and some food and a tray for Constanze.”

“And a bag of litter.” Said Todd. “Plus all the essentials for breakfast in the morning.”

“Can I come with you two ?” Asked Lily.

“Yeah, of course you can.” Said Ruby. “We may need help carrying it all.”

Thio was dragging in a case as they left, he must have arrived back with Sophie. Ruby had ticked everyone off her mental list, they were all safely in Alessia House. Eugenie and Lorenzo might need a room too, though that was up to them. It did make more sense for them to use a hotel. Away from the others so they could watch what went on, without being recognised by local bad guys.

“Is it far to the supermarket ?” Asked Lily.

“No, there’s a Tottus supermarket two blocks away.” Said Todd. “Sophie found it on her first day here. I’m surprised you’ve escaped shopping duty.”

“Just lucky I guess.”

They’d gone less than a few feet and were next to their bus, when Ruby felt Sarah in her mind. No wonderkind connection, Sarah was panicking and Ruby could feel it. They’d all be able to feel it, Sophie and Cal. If Sarah was actually screaming, everyone in the house would be hearing her. It had to be an intruder, or worse, maybe an assassin. For people on vacation, they did seem to be involved in some serious and dangerous matters.

“Sarah.....Sarah is being hurt.” Yelled Ruby.

“Where ?” Asked Todd.

“Upstairs.....Their bedroom.”

Spider would be there, though he might have been attacked first. Silly to let herself get so scared, but Ruby was imagining Spider and Sarah on the floor of their bedroom, both of them hurt and bloody. There was Sarah in her mind again, shrieking about something.

“We need to hurry.” Ruby shouted.

By the time Ruby was running up the main stairs, Sophie was only just in front of her. Cal was right outside the bedroom door, looking unsure what to do. Ruby had no such indecision; she lifted her foot and used her heel on the door. Just above the handle for the best effect, she was becoming quite good at busting open doors. The door might have been unlocked and unbolted, but it was quicker to assume it wasn’t.

“Sarah.....Are you hurt ?” Shouted Sophie.

Still so much mental noise from Sarah, as Ruby ran into the room. Spider looked fine, though he was staring intently at what Sarah was holding.

“Oh, it’s just a fucking dead bird.” Said Sophie.

“Why was Sarah so scared ?” Asked Cal.

The bird was quite small and Ruby sensed it had been dead for a while, at least a few hours. A rather drab looking thing with a few streaks of blue in its wing feathers. Sarah was lamenting over the bird, as though it had been a friend. Ruby liked animals, but all that emotion over a dead wild bird.....

“It must have got in while we were away and starved to death.” Said Spider.

“My fault, I left a small window open.” Said Sarah.

Her best friend was holding a tiny dead bird and crying. There was still the mental anguish too; it still filled the room for those who could feel it.

“Oh, stop all the shouting, Sarah.....You scared me.” Said Ruby.

“I haven’t been shouting, Ruby. I’m just upset.....Poor thing, it’s so tiny.”

Sarah hadn’t been shouting or screaming, Ruby realised that now. It was all mental anxiety and anguish, privately bottled up in her best friend’s head. She hugged Sarah, with the bird still held between them. The mental shouting was actually a good thing, now it had stopped and Ruby could think straight again. If Sarah was ever really attacked in the house, every wonderkind would know.

“Fine.....As long as you’re alright.” Said Ruby. “And Spider of course, what would we do without him ?”



“No more breakfasts that stick to your ribs.” Said Sophie.

“Just, don’t do it again....My head hurts.” Said Cal.

“Do what ?.....I never did anything.” Said Sarah.

Sarah would eventually realise why just about everyone in the house seemed to be in the room she shared with Spider. Not that stopping the mental outpourings was possible, which was just as well. Caleb offered to dig a hole in the garden and bury the dead bird. Sophie said she had a small box to bury it in. By the time calm was restored, Ruby realised that Constanze still had no food, or anywhere to answer the call of nature.

“Come on.....Time for the supermarket, or there’ll be no breakfast in the morning.” She said.

Once outside it was tempting to take their bus and really load up on groceries. It was a nice day though and the Tottus supermarket wasn’t far. She decided that they’d walk.

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Eugenie had decided to stay at Alessia House, until she’d felt something in the mind of a woman near the station. A woman being driven in a fairly new BMW, definitely not a taxi. Cabs can be traced; most had phone numbers on the side. Where was the cab at a certain time ? Who had it been picking up ? Sometimes it was almost embarrassingly easy. Eugenie hadn’t even managed to get the plate number for the expensive looking BMW.

“There.....Did you see her ?” She’d asked Lol.

“Who ?”

It wasn’t his fault, there were a lot of men and women near the station. A dark coloured BMW, Eugenie saw it sideways on, before it was hidden by traffic. Just as she lost sight of it, there were more worrying thoughts, this time from the male driver.

“Damn, Lol.....Damn.....Ruby isn’t paranoid.” She said. “They want to kill her, the couple in the dark coloured BMW.”

“Did you get their number ?” Asked Lol.

Ruby was bound to ask the same question and the answer would sound just as stupid the second time around. There they were, surrounded by their bags, with no way to chase after the couple.

“No.” She said.

“We could get a cab and go after them.” Suggested Lol.

“They’re in the traffic now and gone. Give me a moment to think.” She muttered.

The couple with heads full of hate were in the wind, gone and there was no chance of finding them in the heavy traffic. It changed everything from a game about watching Ruby’s back, to a real life or death situation.

“The house is in the Miraflores district.” Said Eugenie. “Ruby mentioned there are a lot of decent hotels, not that far from them. We’ll go into full tourist mode.....We’ll get a taxi and ask the driver to recommend a hotel in that district. I’ll call Ruby later, but for now.....We’ll try and vanish into the background.”

“Sounds good, I love the hotel lifestyle.” Said Lol. “Round the clock room service and someone makes the bed every day.”

She had to chuckle at him, it did sound pretty good. She stood guard over their bags, while Lol strode into the traffic to get a cab.

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Ruby tended to have a changeable relationship with the security services, even the British. At the end of the day politicians tended to pull at the levers of power and Ruby had never met a politician she liked that much. A few years before she’d been instructed to present herself at the British

embassy in Paris. There had been a genuine concern about whether they'd let her out again. Silly really, she had to be one of the hardest people in the world to keep contained. She could walk through walls and become just a shadow. Even if she'd been sedated all the time, she had friends who could walk through walls and rescue her. Besides, the CIA appeared to think she was some kind of super hero. Fine, as long as they didn't expect her to wear some kind of costume. All the logic in the world didn't help though. As Ruby walked towards the American Embassy in Lima, she worried about them refusing to let her out again.

"Max hated entering embassies.....It is officially foreign soil, part of the USA." Said Ruby.

"We all miss Max, but he was a little crazy." Said Lily.

Ruby had told the CIA she was very pleased to receive an invite for a chat, but she wanted to bring a friend. Not the exact words of the brief telephone conversation, but that was the gist of it. Maybe the CIA in Peru weren't that busy? They'd seemed delighted for Lily to be at the meeting.

"Max was paranoid, but with a reason." Said Ruby. "He once reported to his CIA handler and ended up in a prison in Africa. His wife once told me he had no idea how he'd got there. One moment a friendly chat, the next.....Poof, he was in a sweaty jail in one of the old African colonies."

"They probably put something in his coffee." Said Lily. "Coffee has a strong flavour that masks just about anything."

Lily was smiling at her and obviously thought the best way to deal with a minor obsession, was to feed it. Ruby didn't really think she'd be drugged and on a plane to Botswana that night. She wasn't being stupid.....Somewhere deep inside, she didn't trust any national security department. Mara and her family she did trust, but rooms full of eager young graduates in suits.....She was glad she'd brought Lily with her.

"Here we go." Said Ruby.

"Give them all a very low power smile and we'll be fine." Muttered Lily.

"Oh, I intend to."

The guard on the gate was expecting them and let them in. Once in the compound, Lily's document case was briefly examined. Nothing heavy though, no one had even asked for some form of photo ID. She was famous, though the guards had no real idea why. Her face had been on a screen in the security office for the last forty eight hours, with instructions to treat her like visiting royalty. Ruby gave both the guards a very low power version of her special smile. She also used her smile on the young woman who came to meet them. An impeccably dressed young woman of course, with hair that looked fresh out of the stylist.

"Welcome, I've come to take you to the bunker." Said the woman. "Not a really bunker, just our name for the secure rooms in the basement."

"Who are we seeing?" Asked Lily. "No one so far has mentioned a name."

"Oh, really.....I suppose someone fouled up. You're seeing a regional boss; he flew in last night on one of the agency Gulfstreams. There have been developments in West Virginia and he wanted to see you."

Still no name in the woman's head and that was just about impossible. Ruby didn't want to delve too deeply into her mind; the CIA did seem to be on her side, for now at least. There was now mind reading technology out there and mind blocking devices. All quite crude, but as with all cutting edge tech, it would get better. Ruby and the wunderkinds had shown it could be done, so several organisations were spending billions to develop technology to delve into human minds. The machines would never be as good at it as her, but there was already talk about installing mind scanners at airports. Planning to bring down a passenger jet.....With luck, the scanner would make

sure that didn't happen. The down elevator had descended for quite a while. Ruby wondered if the Peruvian government knew how deep the Americans were burrowing into the ground? As the elevator doors opened, the woman took them to the left. Ruby was feeling a little performance anxiety; she still hadn't managed to pull the woman's name out of her head, or the name of who they were there to see.

"So, who will I be seeing?" Asked Ruby.

"Oh, didn't I mention it?"

"No, you didn't."

The bitch was playing with her, the building was obviously using some kind of mind blocker, or at least the bunker had one. There were rumours that one of her old enemies had moved into telepathic research. Yes, the couple who'd run Gallaan Industries, had switched over to genetically modified food and mind control devices. Or at least, that was the latest rumour.

"You'll be seeing Darius, Darius T Weisbaum. I believe you know him?"

Ruby wanted to swear, but contended herself with giving Lily a sort of 'oh fuck' look. Darius.....Of all the roughly twenty two thousand people employed by the CIA, they had to send him.

"Yes, good old Darius.....We're almost inseparable." Said Ruby.

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