

Ruby V : Machu Picchu

Chapter 22 – Press Pause

“Strangely, there had been nothing in any MI6 course on dealing with eccentric friends and their dysfunctional relationships with the likes of Spider. There needed to be and Lily was going to let them know, once she was back home.”

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The first thing everyone did after getting out of the bus and stretching, was to thoroughly search Alessia House. The Colonel’s cult had been there and two people who’d looked after the house had been killed.

“The cult could have left a few nasty surprises behind.” As Sophie had pointed out.

Booby traps, listening devices, even someone camped out in the extensive attic rooms. Todd organised the search and everywhere was looked at, at least twice. Nothing was found; it seemed the cult had probably been there to kill whoever might be in the house, not to leave nasty surprises. An old rocket launcher was found in Sophie’s room, which turned out to be hers. Even Caleb said he had no idea where she’s acquired the Russian made antique weapon. It was hidden at the back of a cupboard. Luckily the police called to the murder scene, hadn’t insisted on searching the entire building.

“What is it with you and rocket launchers, Sophie ?” Eugenie had asked.

“I honestly don’t know.” Sophie had replied.

Thio claimed to have spotted a mouse in one of the attic spaces, but no one seemed overly concerned by sharing the building with a few mice. They’d been through a lot and as Ruby said when Todd reported on the securing of Alessia House.....

“It’s all about pressing pause for a week or two.” Said Ruby. “There’s that wonderful expression Foxy uses.....Decompress, everyone needs to decompress after the battle with Arthur’s cult.”

“There was a letter in the dining room, addressed to you.” Said Todd. “I’m guessing it’s from the people who rented us this place. The police tend not to use expensive looking envelopes.”

There was half a page of handwriting; Todd could see the black ink through the paper. Ruby read it through before giving him the letter.

“They understand my need for privacy, but insist that I talk to the local police.” Said Ruby.

“Formalities must be observed, or something like that.”

“Can’t you call someone ? Foxy maybe or get Spider to phone his chum at DINI ?” Asked Todd.

“If we were being arrested, then yes.” Muttered Ruby. “This is the great mindless bureaucracy at work though, the local police need to tick boxes and file away our answers to questions. Sadly, there is no avoiding an interview with the Lima police.”

“Shall I call and arrange it ?” Asked Todd.

“Yes, thank you.....I’ll go and see Sophie.” Said Ruby. “I intend to pester her into filling up the fridge again. There’s nothing in there apart from mouldy bread and milk that’s well on the way to being cheese.”

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Sophie hadn’t minded being given the kitchen to restock. Caleb was a definite to use as a pack horse and Thio had tagged along to buy a few things for himself. Not just the fridge, the cupboards were

pretty bare too. Once Cal had agreed to go there was enough carrying ability to buy food for everyone, for a fortnight. There was almost a nostalgic feel to trotting down the road to the Tottus supermarket, with its nice looking green carrier bags.

“Oh, should we have brought our own bags ?” Asked Cal.

“We’re fine.....I don’t think the idea of carrier bags being evil, has reached Lima.” Said Caleb.

“They do really nice pastries.” Said Sophie.

Had everyone already been to the Tottus ? To be honest, Sophie couldn’t remember, but Thio definitely hadn’t been before. It gave her an excuse for a ten minute monologue on what was good and what to avoid. By the time she’d finished, they were there, looking across the road at the front doors of the supermarket.

“We need a trolley.....One each.” Said Sophie. “Check the wheels don’t wobble about.”

“Oh.....You’re right.” Said Cal. “I really hate that.”

It was shopping to military level precision and if any of them felt like complaining, Sophie saw no sign of it. She split the shopping list up between them, with one golden rule coming with their portion of the list.

“Buy a few bits for yourself; it’ll all go on the card used for Alessia House bills and food. Never, ever and I mean ever.....Forget anything on the list.” Said Sophie. “I will be checking.”

They were all so happy, faces smiling at her. In truth, Sophie had expected resistance to her shopping by total control. It had been a while though, since any of them had been shopping with a trolley and someone else picking up the bill.

“They do slippers.....Can I buy a pair of the yellow ones ?” Asked Cal.

“Yes, of course you can.” Said Sophie.

So far, as far as Sophie was aware, Ruby hadn’t looked down any of the supermarket bills for Alessia House. It was unlikely she’d start now and there was a limit on how many personal items her three helpers, could throw into their trolleys. Everyone bought a pair of slippers, including Caleb.

“Is there a chance, Sophie.....Should we be on the lookout for Charlotte ?” Asked Cal.

“Yes, I was wondering about that.” Said Thio.

Caleb was looking at her too, though he wasn’t asking the question. There was no official answer to such questions; Ruby seemed to have her mind on bigger things.

“I could give you a lot of soothing words, Cal.” Said Sophie. “The truth is.....I have no idea where Charlie is right now, or if she considers us all to be targets. Just be alert and keep your eyes open.....Sorry if that’s not much of an answer.”

“At least you told us the truth.” Said Thio.

“I’d rather have the truth than lots of soothing lies.” Said Cal.

“Wow, they’ve got some great looking coconut macarons.” Said Caleb.

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Lily wasn’t sure if Ruby was trying to punish her. All the fuss about who was going to drive the bus, all the heated arguments with Todd. Ruby had made it quite clear that if Lily Marigold Faria wanted to be in charge of their bus, then so be it. She’d been given the job of getting it serviced and keeping it roadworthy. Yes, thinking about the conversation with Ruby, it had sounded like a punishment. Lily actually didn’t mind looking after their elderly and gaudily painted orange bus. And, after years of working for Foxy, Ruby’s moods were nothing, she was a pussycat.

“.....just so long as I have time to get my wyvern tattoo finished.” Said Lily.

Sarah was with her, part of the never go out alone policy. In place before Charlie began getting creepy, though not always adhered to. Sarah had a few things to buy and Spider had other duties.

Lily quite liked Sarah, so it had the makings of a fun day out in Lima. They were still several blocks away from the garage where the bus was going to be serviced and the traffic seemed intent on making them late.

"I remember you mentioning the tattoo." Said Sarah. "I like the tattoo they did for Ruby."

"You should get one; the woman who does them is brilliant." Said Lily. "Some claim to be artists, but her.....She's the genuine article."

"I might.....Not today though." Said Sarah. "Something like that.....I need to talk it over with Spider."

Sarah was on the row of seats behind her, the best place to sit for a conversation with the driver. Lily could even see her, by looking into the rear view mirror at a bit of an angle.

"Would he get your approval for getting a tattoo ? I bet he wouldn't."

"Hey, don't play me, Lily." Said Sarah. "We're a proper couple now and we discuss just about everything."

"I heard rumours you're going to start a family." Said Lily.

"Yes, once we get back home to London.....My birth control pills are getting flushed down the loo."

Sarah laughed and Lily looked at her in the mirror. The traffic was heavy, the road rather narrow, with several cars parked where they narrowed the road even more. It had to happen one day; the bus clipped a wing mirror. Not so much clipped, as knocked it off the car and sent it bouncing down the road.

"Fuck !" Said Lily.

No one seemed to have noticed, which was good. Lily was normally quite law abiding, it had kind of been important when she'd worked for British Intelligence. Now though, working for Ruby and in a strange country with traffic laws she wasn't sure of. Lily looked up and down the road and no one seemed to be taking an interest in their bus. Lily had slowed down to a crawl, but speeded up again.

"That.....Never happened." Said Lily. "Are we agreed on that ?"

"What never happened ?"

Lily grinned at Sarah in the mirror, though she was far more focused on watching the road than she had been. There were a few back and forth comments on various things, but Lily had been shaken by the wing mirror bouncing down the road. There were no more proper conversations, until they pulled into the forecourt of the people who'd promised to do wonderful things to their bus. Lily had booked the extra special service. Not cheap, but they had as good as promised to blue print their ancient bus. It was a long way to the Nazca lines and they needed it to be reliable.

"I could always call Spider and ask him about a tattoo." Said Sarah. "Any ideas what might suit me, Lily ? Where do you think it would look good ?"

"An imp, she had one in her examples book." Said Lily. "About two inches across, it would look great near your collar bone, or on your shoulder blade. I'd recommend round the front near your collar bone.....You'd blow Spider's mind, whenever you take your blouse off."

"That sounds so great." Said Sarah. "Go and book us in.....I'll give Spider a call."

"I really need your language skills." Said Lily. "Spanish I'm fine with, everyday Spanish. If it gets technical I'm in trouble."

"You booked it over the phone, you'll be fine." Said Sarah. "I'll only be five minutes and.....If you have agreed to marry his nephew, I'm pretty sure I can get you out of it."

"Fine." Said Lily, with a huge sigh.

Strangely, there had been nothing in any MI6 course on dealing with eccentric friends and their dysfunctional relationships with the likes of Spider. There needed to be and Lily was going to let

them know, once she was back home. She wandered through a large set of open doors and into a bay where two men were working on an old Ford truck.

“You must be Lily Faria ?”

“Yes, and by the accent, you’re Dale ?”

They’d had a conversation over the phone, which had become a quick Bio on Dale, after she’d mentioned his American accent. Dale had been born in Boston, gone to Peru on an extended gap year and married a local woman. That had been twenty years ago and he was now the proud father of three children. Strangely, he still sounded as though he’d just got off the plane from Boston.

“Bring your bus inside where I can get a good look at her.” Said Dale.

Gender and inanimate objects. Lily had friends who gave everything a gender, even the kitchen kettle and their microwave. Lily had made her car an honorary female, though she had no idea why. The gun tucked into her jacket pocket was a ‘he’ which probably had some kind of deep meaning. Lily went back to the bus, to find a smiling Sarah.

“Yes, he loved the idea.....I’m going to get an imp tattoo.” Said Sarah.

“Look at her books; it doesn’t have to be an imp.”

“No, Lily.....I’ve set my heart on an imp.” Said Sarah.

Lily drove the bus into the building, with Dale directing her onto a huge commercial ramp. Once she and Sarah were out of the bus, he took it up so that the bottom was at about head height.

“Alright, let’s get a good look.” Said Dale. “You see a lot of these in Bolivia, all over the place. Rare in Peru though for some reason.....Hmmm, you probably don’t want this left on the floor pan.”

It was a cheap tracker, the sort available from lots of different kinds of stores and online suppliers. Lily agreed with Spider, it was the fault of TV cop shows. Everyone wanted to track everyone these days and the trackers were now relatively cheap.

“That.....Wasn’t under there yesterday.” Said Sarah. “I was under there, getting dirty and gritty.....That definitely wasn’t there then.”

“Kids.....You mentioned taking students to see the Nazca Lines.” Said Dale. “Probably a prank by them, seeing what teacher gets up to.”

“Yes, that has to be it.” Said Lily.

Dale handed her the tracker, which she turned off and gave to Sarah.

“If I find any more when the guys get to work, I’ll keep them for you.” Said Dale.

“Thank you.” Said Sarah.

Who’d put a tracker on their bus ? The list was worryingly long, though at the moment, a henchperson of Charlie’s had to be top of the list. If Dale suspected it wasn’t a student prank, his face wasn’t giving it away.

“Hmmm, the exhaust system looks rusty.” Muttered Dale. “Expensive to fit a new one, but if you’re relying on her take you to the Nazca lines and back.....I’d recommend replacing it.”

“Fine.....Our old bus mustn’t let us down.” Said Lily.

“Not that you can see much at ground level.” Said Dale. “To see the lines properly, you either need a drone, or plane. You can hire planes to take you over some of the lines.”

“I heard that.....We’ll probably use a drone with high definition cameras.” Said Lily.

“Expensive.....I don’t feel too bad now, about the cost of a new exhaust.” Said Dale.

“We’re also looking for a camper to hire, something nice.” Said Sarah.

“And a trailer to carry some surveying equipment.” Added Lily. “If you know someone who might be able to help ?”

“Of course I do.....I know every vehicle dealer in Lima, large and small.” Said Dale.

It took an hour for Dale to look over their bus and come up with a fairly solid quote on putting everything right. Not as much as Lily had feared, though it would take a few days to get the parts. "It has to be ready by this weekend." Said Lily.

"I can get the parts flown in from La Paz." Said Dale. "As I mentioned, there are a lot of these buses in Bolivia. It will mean putting the quote up by about a third.....And I'll need half the quote up front. You know where my business is located after all, but I know nothing about you."

From intelligence contacts to getting a little TLC for a bus, it was all surprisingly similar. It came down to making a judgement about someone, usually based on feel, intuition if you like. Lily had a good feel about Dale and he was right.....If he messed them around, they did know where to find him.

"Cash alright?" Asked Lily.

"Perfect." Said Dale.

"Can I use your bathroom?"

"Yes, but it's a bit basic.....Grubby to be honest."

"I'll survive.....And I guarantee I've used worse." Said Lily.

The cash was in a bag under her top and taped to her tummy. A lot of cash, she preferred to not let Dale know how much cash she was routinely carrying around in Lima. Handy though, to be able to drop a large pile of notes on the table. If haggling wasn't doing it, a pile of ready cash had been known to seal the deal. After getting herself dressed again, Lily took the dollar bills to Dale and put them into his hands.

"There'll be a bonus too for completing the work by this weekend." Said Lily.

"Brilliant, I knew we were going to get along." Said Dale.

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"Ideally Sophie should be here, I did rather hijack her plans." Said Ruby. "She's still out though, at the supermarket to make sure we have breakfast in the morning."

"She asked for a list from me." Said Spider. "So, it'll be one of my army fry-ups in the morning."

"I miss those from our time in Kenya." Said Todd.

Todd had already mentioned the police coming to Alessia House at the end of the week. No urgency was good; it meant it really was likely to be a box ticking exercise. The usual asking if there was anything worth stealing in the house. There was actually, quite a few family treasures belonging to the owners. The managing agent should have a list of the valuable paintings and antique furniture. With luck, the local cops should be happy to call it an attempted robbery that had gone terribly wrong. Before leaving for London, Ruby would make sure the families of the deceased were financially compensated. Not that cash could ever replace a loved one, but it stopped those left behind from going hungry. Arthur had been sent to Limbo by Cal, to be eaten by some unknown creature, or pack of creatures. Not the ideal form of justice, but to Ruby, it would do.

"I have Kallina's journals and lots of maps and books on the Nazca Lines." Said Ruby. "Sophie has also given me everything she had on the Nazca people and their culture."

Everything was on the same long table in a room where they'd gone through plans to visit Machu Picchu, Huancayo and just about everywhere else they'd visited. That was the good thing about a large house; there were enough rooms to have a dedicated war room. It had been called the vacation planning room, but now.....With Charlie being especially strange. It felt like their war room.

"I know you've done it before and I can see a red tick on the map." Said Spider. "Just to confirm though, where are we going to start digging?"

"Not just digging." Said Todd. "We'll have a drone to fly over the famous parts of the lines. Plus, everyone will want to see the historical sites. It's not all about lines dug across the desert."

Spider was looking at Todd in a very patient way, like humouring someone who really hadn't listened properly to the question. Some might say Spider didn't suffer fools gladly. In reality, that phrase tended to mean people who got grumpier with every passing year. Ruby stabbed her finger at a red tick she'd drawn on the map. It was well away from the well-known and popular parts of the Nazca desert. That made sense.....Anywhere well-known and someone like Ellie and her students would have dug it up years before.

"Here.....At the rear of Vista Alegre." Said Ruby. "They've built more housing since Kallina was there. We will be almost digging up someone's back garden."

"A few local electricity company uniforms and we're there to fix a cable or two." Said Spider.

"I've a contact who can probably get the uniforms." Said Todd. "By the sound of it, we'll need a truck that looks like an electricity company repair truck. Lily seems to be the current vehicle wizard."

Good, they seemed to have plans that made sense. Ruby had told Lily that everything had to be ready to go in a week. In truth and with the Charlie situation, Ruby was happy to let their timetable be a little more flexible.

"Generic uniforms will probably do." Said Ruby. "A sign on the truck for the local electricity provider will be all the public notice. I like the sound of it."

"I'll find out which power company looks after Vista Alegre." Said Todd.

"Where are we all going to stay?" Asked Spider. "We seem to be building a small convoy of vehicles. We can hardly park them all outside of.....Let me look at the map..... Hostal La Posada Del Molino."

"You're right, Spider." Said Ruby. "We need to work out a method to keep our bus and the camper away from the vehicles we'll be using to dig up part of Vista Alegre. I'm thinking of....."

There was a loud knock on the door and Caleb came in. He was carrying a bowl of local fruit, which he placed in the centre of the table.

"Sophie asked me to bring this in." Said Caleb. "We went shopping and almost emptied the supermarket."

"Very nice, much appreciated." Said Ruby.

"Coffee will follow.....The machine is still spluttering." Said Caleb.

"Did Sophie get everything for my fry-ups?" Asked Spider.

"Yes.....And before I forget. A tall Asian looking guy was at the door.....He asked me to give a note to Ruby." Said Caleb.

Ruby knew who'd given Caleb the note, she recognised the writing. Lau was good at the game; his street craft would have pleased the late Gérard Villand. He must have waited for Sophie to enter Alessia House and Caleb to be on his own.

"It's from Lau." Said Ruby.

"What.....Is he still outside, Caleb?" Asked Todd.

"I have no idea; he was just a polite guy with a note." Said Caleb.

Todd went rushing out, though Ruby knew he wouldn't find Lau waiting outside. The meeting, assuming Lau wanted a meeting? Would be when it suited him, not them. Ruby opened the envelope.

'Ruby,

I'm being told you think I'm on Charlotte's side. I'm not on her side !

I'm not on anyone's side !

We need to talk, very soon.

Lau.'

There was a phone number, probably a burner phone he'd bought at the airport. Ruby handed the note to Spider.

"It looks like the war is going to happen." Said Spider.

"Yes, but not that kind of war." Said Ruby. "There is a bit of good news. He seems upset that I think he's on Charlotte's side."

"But he's not on our side." Said Spider.

"I feel such an idiot.....He looked like a harmless Asian guy." Said Caleb.

"Korean, Caleb.....Lau is Korean." Said Ruby. "One of us, a wunderkind. Don't beat yourself up. He probably hit you with what Spider refers to as the whammy. You'd have thought he was a nice harmless guy, if he'd been carrying a severed head."

"Oh." Muttered Caleb.

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They had been going to use a taxi to get to the tattoo place, but Dale had one of his guys drive them there in an old Dodge truck. The kind with a cab for the passengers and a flat back to carry whatever you wanted it to carry. Sarah had felt every bump in the road, but she quite liked a bit of adventure in her life. The old Dodge was definitely more exciting than a Lima taxi. The driver had even refused a ten dollar tip for his time.

"Oh, my bum will be sore for a week." Said Sarah. "My tailbone got wedged against something that bashed into me on every bump in the road. Fun though, better than a taxi."

"Yeah, the seats need a refurb or something." Said Lily.

Sarah liked the outside of the tattoo parlour. Nice clean windows and lots of colourful displays of posters. Anyone wondering what a tattoo might look like.....The window display gave them a pictorial blow by blow. Windows were like that for Sarah; they either made her love the place, or hate it. She was beginning to love the tattoo place.

"Not sure how much cash I have on me." Said Sarah. "Can you lend me a little if I need it?"

"Of course.....No problem." Said Lily.

The inside looked as nice as the window had promised. Sarah followed Lily into the back of the parlour, where she seemed to be recognised. Coffee followed and Sarah was given a sample book to look through. Sarah knew she could easily become a tattoo addict, when she flicked through the book. There it was on about the sixth page, an imp with a mischievous grin on its face.

"You could have it on the inside of your upper thigh." Said Lily. "I guarantee that will blow Spider's mind."

"Oh, I am so tempted to do that." Said Sarah. "Do you have one ? I bet you have an imp on your thigh."

"I can't show you here." Said Lily.

"Where better ? We're both going to strip off a few items of clothing to get inked."

Luckily no one came in, as Lily slid her trousers down and showed her the mischievous imp within touching distance of her most intimate place.

"I knew I'd love it.....That imp....That is what I want." Said Sarah.

"Where are you going to have it ?" Asked Lily.

"Right at the top of my thigh of course."

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Trudy had called him the previous evening. It seemed she was coming in to the Polandrous building anyway to see Penny.

“After the incident with Charlotte.” Trudy had said. “It was thought that you might appreciate someone to talk to.....And many have told me I’m a good listener, Abe.”

“Nothing really happened and I haven’t seen her since.” He’d said.

“Still, having a chat can’t hurt. Is that alright ?”

“Yes of course, Trudy.” He’d said. “To be honest, I do sometimes feel like the only wunderkind in the village.”

“Oh, Abe.....We can’t have that. I’ll see you tomorrow afternoon.”

Abe didn’t know Trudy, though he had heard a lot of nice things about her. Born in Bermuda in nineteen fifty five, she had that rare thing of black skin and freckles. Now living in London, or so he believed. Trudy had a child he’d heard, maybe two kids by now. That tended to mean Trudy looked after matters in London, while the others went abroad to sort out.....Whatever needed sorting out. Like all the wunderkinds, Trudy seemed fairly immune to the ravages of time. Anyone passing her on the street would see a tall, pretty black woman of about nineteen, maybe twenty. Tall, which he’d heard had caused a few problems in China. Hard to go undercover when China isn’t exactly full of tall, thin black women. As to the father of her children ? Abe knew nothing at all. Of course he made a point of running into Penny when she came back from lunch.

“Oh, you’ll love Trudy.” Penny had said. “She has a wicked sense of humour. Trudy has developed an ability to look through fragments of time lines. If you want an idea of your future, or several potential futures.....Trudy can tell you. A bit scary to be honest. What she told me came true.”

“What did Trudy tell you ?” He’d asked.

“It’s private, Abe.....I’m not telling you that.”

His imagination had been on overdrive after that. When reception called to tell him Trudy was waiting for him in George’s old office on the top floor, Abe was ready for something weird to happen. Not necessarily prepared for it, but the afternoon was unlikely to be boring. He still had a thrill when the elevator knew who he was and even put his name on the panel. To the in house systems he was Abe Duale. The thrill intensified, as he was now cleared for all floors in the Polandrous building. Was that permanent ?

“I do hope it is.” He muttered.

The top floor was the holy of holies of the building, the place everyone treated with a kind of reverence. Trudy looked as he expected her to look, though he hadn’t expected her to be wearing jeans and Taylor Swift T shirt.

“Come in, Abe.” Said Trudy. “Nothing to worry about, we’re seeing everyone Charlie has been talking to and.....She’s been a busy woman.”

“I didn’t see her again.....Charlie has this idea about taking over the planet. She wants us to use our gifts to rule the humans.” Said Abe.

“A fun idea in theory, I once liked the idea of living in Buckingham Palace.” Said Trudy. “Hundreds of servants looking after my every whim. Seemingly endless amounts of money to buy anything I wanted. Leaving aside the morality of a privileged few ruling the many.....There are eight billion of them.”

“I know.....I was never going to join Charlie.” Said Abe. “She is serious though and if Ruby won’t join her, she’ll be an enemy.....Those are Charlie’s words.”

“And you called Eugenie, who let everyone know. Thank you for that, Abe.” Said Trudy. “As I said, leaving aside the question of right and wrong....We could do a lot of damage to mankind, but in the end we would lose. By then this poor used and abused planet, would be shoved a little further towards Armageddon.”

"I actually like how we are." Said Abe. "All these powers and gifts, yet no one knows."

"Yes, I like that too." Said Trudy. "Like we're Clark Kent, but don't need a phone booth to change in."

"Oh yes, exactly like Clark Kent." Said Abe. "I like being anonymous and living slightly in the shadows."

"It does have its appeal.....I know you're not going to join Charlie. You can see the future if she wins though, or one of several unpleasant futures." Said Trudy. "I can show you the world Charlotte wants to create, but only if you want to see it. Would you like to see it?"

"I don't need convincing. I know Charlie has gone bad.....I saw it in her eyes."

"No convincing intended.....I can show you if you like, but only if you want to." Said Trudy.

Abe had been pre-warned by his conversation with Penny; the offer had been kind of expected. Did he want to see one of several nasty futures Charlie could inflict on mankind and the planet?

Supposing people he cared about were dead, killed in terrible ways? It was the idea of wanting to know how people were in the future, but only if they were alive and healthy. No one wants to see the future if it's nothing but horrors and bad news. He almost said no, but there was his sister. He needed to see how Cal handled whatever might be about to happen.

"Yes, thank you Trudy." He said. "Show me the future."

"Only one of several potential outcomes." Said Trudy. "Now.....Lean right back in your chair....."

Trudy had a small silver ball in her hand, that seemed to suddenly appear. She placed it about two feet above his head, where it remained, hovering in the air. Abe's view of the world changed, lines were everywhere, as though a manic architect was trying to draw the entire world. The lines suddenly vanished, leaving him seeing Trudy and the room around them.

"I can see you prefer the view without lines." Said Trudy. "Most people like the change, though the device isn't used on that many. Seeing the future isn't always considered a blessing."

"I want to see Cal.....Please show me the future version of my sister." Said Abe.

"Yes, I only look into minds from a shallow angle, but I can see her dominating your thoughts and concerns." Said Trudy. "Relax, Abe.....Treat this as the dystopian future that can still be avoided."

His view went beyond the room, beyond London and became a confused mass of tiny lines, until he was somewhere he recognised. It was the gardens at the base of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, though now the gardens were being used as a military camp. Men in black uniforms. Posters on walls promising another five years of the cleansing. Something unpleasant had happened and something worse was likely to happen. He heard Trudy's voice, even though he couldn't see her.

"Those that serve Das Geheimnis do well in this world." Said Trudy. "Those that resist are dealt with harshly. So far, fifty thousand have been dealt with in Paris alone. Dealt with means cleansed, which means killed. There is a resistance movement, but for now..... Das Geheimnis are fully in control."

"In control of where?" He asked.

"The world Abe, Charlie effectively controls the entire globe."

There was one female figure among the men in the camp. It was obvious why Trudy had brought him there; his sister was wearing one of the black uniforms. Different to the uniforms worn by the men. It fitted her perfectly and looked expensive, with gold edged cuffs on the jacket.

"Cal." He yelled.

Abe ran at his sister and as his arms closed around her in a hug, he went right through her. It was like trying to touch and converse with a hologram, a very high definition hologram.

"Everything you see is pulled from the timelines, but only as a benign image." Said Trudy. "You can't touch it and it can't see, hear or touch you. Cal could be pulled from the time line, but trust me.....Cal runs Central Security in France. You wouldn't like this version of her."

"This is nonsense.....Cal would never become someone like that." He said.

"Really ?"

It was cruel, really cruel. Trudy knew the place in time she was about to show him. Several of the men were kicking what was probably a prisoner. They were shouting insults in French at him, while others kept kicking him. It looked as though Cal was being merciful, as she called the men off the prisoner. Cal, his little sister.....Brought a gun out of a holster on her hip and shot the young man in the head. Abe put his hands over his eyes.

"No.....No....I don't believe this." He yelled.

"Yes you do, you're well aware of what your sister can do." Said Trudy. "She's a clean slate, largely unwritten. I'm not saying Ruby is exactly a pure influence, but she's a million miles away from Charlie's version of enslaving the human race."

"Alright, I'm convinced." Said Abe. "Please.....No more of this future.....Take me back to London."

"You never left London."

Abe had barely blinked and he was back in the chair again, on the top floor of the Polandrous building. He found he was crying, mainly for his sister, but also a little for himself. Trudy picked up the silver ball that was still hovering above his head and placed it in her pocket.

"It wasn't about convincing you, Abe." Said Trudy. "Ruby will need to do some terrible things soon. Showing you a version of the future, was to make you realise those dreadful things are essential. You need to understand every horror is justified."

"Fine.....Just never show me that version of Cal again, ever."

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Dale had contacts, who had their own contacts, who knew people. Lily had dealt with them all as the week progressed, using Ruby's cash to buy the vehicles they needed and quite a bit of digging equipment. A man simply known as Bobby, had managed to acquire the perfect truck and he had known a large east European man called Krueger who prided himself on being able to find anything Lily might want, at a price. It seemed Krueger doubled as an illegal arms dealer, so she put him in touch with Spider. A real and genuine pastor had become involved at one point, a Pastor Ivor. He'd known a woman called Camila, who could provide uniforms that looked exactly like those used by the power company who supplied electricity to Vista Alegre. Camila had a daughter, Sofia, who knew someone..... In the middle of the weird game of musical chairs with dodgy vehicle dealers and downright crooks, the police had arrived to dot a few I's and cross a few T's on the murders at Alessia House. As had been predicted, it was a box ticking exercise and had taken up very little of her busy day. Ruby had been there to see the police off the premises and smile a lot.

"Did you talk to Snowy yet ?" Ruby had asked her.

"Snowy died I'm afraid, quite recently." Lily had said. "It seems all the special forces training in the world can't stop weird hours, poor food and too much booze from having an effect. I spoke to his son, who told me Snowy died of pancreatic cancer."

"That is sad, Snowy taught us all so much." Ruby had said. "He was the one who taught George low altitude parachute drops.....George, can you imagine that ? I didn't know Snowy had a son."

He could have been known as Snowy Junior, or Son of Snowy, even Snowy Two wouldn't have been too bad. Quite a character over the phone, the son of Snowy had told her all his father's old buddies knew him as Snowy Secundus.....Yeah, another group of guys with a thing about the Roman Empire.

"Seem a nice guy and he has his father's contacts." Lily had said. "I'm talking to him later today about what we need."

"Supplied and ready to use ?"

“Oh yes, they’ll even come in their own trailer.” Lily had said.

When she made the call, Snowy Secundus was even happy to give her a few anecdotes about George tumbling out of planes while training in Cyprus. Anecdotes that could be ice breakers at futures meals or parties. In the end, the conversation became all about business.

“Ruby stressed again that we don’t have the expertise to assemble them.” Said Lily.

“Very few do, Lily.” Said Snowy. “We’re not talking about hobby drones, these are the best the military are using.....Anyone’s military. You’re getting the full missile payload too.”

“Who will you send to train us and assemble them ?”

“Me.....I couldn’t resist seeing the people my dad talked about.” Said Snowy. “An airforce cargo plane most of the way and then a small aircraft that can happily land just about anywhere in the Nazca desert.”

“Wow.....I’m glad you’re coming.” Said Lily. “We’ve expertise at most things, but military drones.....They’re a bit specialised.”

“Oh yes, they’re definitely not for amateurs. Who are you going to be using them against ?”

“Being honest.....We’re not quite sure yet.” Said Lily.

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