

### Ruby 3

#### Chapter 9 - Paris

**“Levan was from Georgia. Reasonably attractive and incredibly easy to manipulate. Best of all he had been driving a decent sized green van when she’d spotted him. Kallina had smiled at him while he was waiting at traffic lights. He was now her unpaid driver and baggage handler.”**

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~Then~

#### **Paris – Five years previously**

Malou was behind the desk at the hotel when they returned. The small and rather elderly lady had given up her life in the Paris underworld to run a hotel, but she still had her contacts. She asked Ruby for a private chat, while Spider and Sarah headed upstairs to their room.

“I don’t want to know your business Ruby, but someone is interested in you and your friends.”

“Has someone been asking about us Malou ?”

Her hair was grey now, but her eyes still sparkled with intellect. Malou bobbed her head in the direction of the street.

“No, they’re good these ones. About six of them, they keep walking through the street, watching the hotel without appearing to watch.”

“They’re probably George’s people.”

“No, I know his people. They’re not police either, you need to be careful Ruby.”

“I will Malou, thank you.”

Ruby went upstairs to tell the others, but their room had a do not disturb sign on the handle and the sounds of sex coming through the door. She went to her own room and ordered a steak and green salad from room service. It would have been nice to have gone out for dinner, but Ruby used the time to go through the file and add notes about what she’d pulled from the mind of Henri Gervex.

“Dinning alone Miss Ruby ?”

“Yes, I have things to do. Thank you Raoul.”

She tipped the waiter and her steak was perfect. Then back to the file and she was amazed how much she managed to remember and add to the pages of grubby A4 paper. Another address in Varna and the face of a blonde girl called Kallina, who may have been the girl with Kurt in London. The remains of her salad were limp and unappetizing by the time she’d finished and locked the file away in her case. It was after midnight, but Ruby wasn’t sleepy, too many of the nightmare images she’d pulled from Henri still filled her head.

“Please let them be gone in the morning.” She muttered.

Ruby took a bottle of beer from the minibar and headed up the stairs to the roof. She went past the staff rooms, the sound of a couple having sex coming from one door. In another room a transistor radio was playing the local Jazz FM station known simply as TSF. No guests were officially allowed on the roof, but Ruby was a personal friend of the owners and considered herself above such petty rules. As far as she knew they hadn’t even been entered in the hotel register, but Malou had accepted her payment in cash for a night’s stay.

In the summer the roof had been a favourite hangout for off duty staff, but the night was cold and Ruby had the wonderful view of Paris to herself. She sipped her beer and sat on the low wall, looking down on the streets far below. Ruby drifted off into her thoughts and nearly missed the footsteps as

someone else climbed up the stairs to the roof. She automatically felt for their mind, expecting it to be Spider, or Raoul, coming to see if she wanted company. Instead Ruby found the mind of Henri and it was full of hatred. Fear too, fear of her !

“Why do you fear me Henri ?” She asked without turning.

Ruby turned to face him and Henri was holding a knife. Nothing that looked military, but a large kitchen knife with a wooden handle. She watched the lights from the street sparkle in the stainless steel blade and felt the madness in his mind.

“You have to go,” said Henri, “all of you. You all have to die !”

His mind was full of memories of death, strange unnatural death. Fear was now driving him, fear of Ruby Mason. She gave him everything she could put into one smile. Love, affection, complete trust and for a second his face softened. But then the madness returned to his mind and he was coming towards her, the knife raised to strike.

“Get out of my mind,” he screamed, “thing of evil !”

He stabbed at her and Ruby was gone, moved to her right at a speed too fast to follow. She’d never moved like that before, but she hadn’t been in that kind of situation before. Henri Gervex moved forward with the force of the blow and vanished over the wall. Ruby didn’t need to look into the street, the awful sound of a body hitting the ground told her what had become of the DGSE officer. Then the screaming started from below and Ruby realised she needed to get off the roof and back to her room. She hurt that was the problem. It felt like her muscles had been pulled too hard, but all over her body. She looked at her arm and there was bruising, bruising that was slowly covering most of her arm. Her ribs ached, her hips ached and Ruby suddenly knew she was in trouble. She limped over to the stairs and luckily a maid was coming out of her room.

“Get Malou, please hurry.”

She fell onto the floor and pulled her skirt up. There were massive bruises on her legs where her body had moved too fast for her muscles to handle. How was that even possible ? It may have saved her life, but this new facet of her gift was likely to put her in a wheelchair. It seemed to take ages for Malou to arrive.

“What have you done to yourself child ?”

“I’ll be fine. I just need to get to my room.”

“A commotion right outside the hotel and now this !”

Malou and the maid helped her down the stairs and although every step was agony, it did seem to get her joints moving again. They put her in a chair in her room, while Malou constantly chattered about the dead man in the street.

“Can you get my friends please ?”

“Yes of course. You just rest.”

“...and Malou.....”

“Yes ?”

“Are we in the hotel’s register ?”

“No, you’re my personal guests.”

Ruby trusted Malou, she always had done.

“If the police call on you, about the incident outside. It would be best not to mention us being here.”

Malou pushed another cushion under her hip and kissed her on the forehead.

“Do you need help from my people ?”

“No, we’ll be leaving tomorrow.”

There was the muffled sound of Malou banging on a nearby door and then Sarah was with her, dressed only in a bathrobe and then Spider came in looking worried. Spider had given up on even finding a robe that fitted him and had a quilt wrapped around him.

“Ruby ! Your legs !” Said Sarah.

Her legs were now a livid shade of red and her knees were swelling up.

“I’ll be fine. Don’t ask me how I know, I just do. A few days and I’ll be fine. But we need to leave for Budapest in the morning.”

The pain was bad now, with peaks that almost had her screaming. It was so tempting to ask Spider to get her some painkillers, but they’d make her drowsy. Ruby needed to be alert to organise the day ahead.

“Did you get a driving licence to go with your Canadian passport Spider ?” She asked.

“Yes.”

“You need to hire a car in the morning. Nothing flashy, but big enough so that I can lie down in the back. Haggle with them for a decent long term hire rate, they expect it. Nothing gets them more suspicious than someone who pays full price.”

Spider was grinning at her now.

“More Jurgis wisdom ?”

“Yes, he was one of the best..... until he was killed.”

Sarah looked a little drunk, but Ruby was pleased that she didn’t seem to have emptied the entire minibar in her room.

“And you Sarah. You need to buy winter clothing in the morning, it’s cold where we’re going.”

“Why the urgency ?” Spider asked.

“Henri was here.”

She let them digest that for a second.

“For some reason he came to kill me, even brought a large kitchen knife to do the job. Luckily it’s his body in the street outside and not mine.”

Sarah immediately hugged her, making her cry out in pain.

“Don’t hug me Sarah, it hurts.”

“Did he hurt you ?”

“No. I moved to get away from him. I moved far too quickly and I’m not sure how I did it. It feels like my bones moved too fast for the rest of me, or something like that.”

They were both giving her the same look they’d given her when they realised she could really look into their minds.

“Why did he try to kill you ?” Asked Spider.

“He hated me for some reason and there was fear in his mind. He thought I was one of these people he’s been investigating.”

“Are you one of them ?” Asked Sarah.

Ruby remembered the thoughts in Henri’s mind, he was certain she was. But the other images, the people turned inside out, the mass graves ! Could she really be that kind of monster ?

“Das Geheimnis he called them. He believed I was one of them and I might be. There is only one way to find out. We have to find Kurt.”

Sarah made her comfortable and left her with an open bottle of wine and a packet of Feminax for the pain.

“The only pain killers I have Ruby, sorry.”

Ruby watched out of the window until about 3am, when Malou came to tell her the police had been and left again. It appeared the man was thought to have fallen from the roof of a building a little further up the street. There was a worry eating at her, stopping her sleeping. Henri had moved so fast, almost as if he'd flown off the roof.

"Did I do that in some way?" She mumbled.

At about 4am the pills and wine enabled her to get a few hours sleep.

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**~Now~**

Eugenie had red hair Boudica would have been proud of. Born in Paris in about eighteen twenty nine, she often joked that Paris had hardly changed at all since her birth. She'd promised Nari to look after her child, to keep her with her twenty four hours a day. Baby Seong was currently asleep in her lap.

"I really do feel I should have gone with them." Said George. "If they find Frank's body, I should be there."

"Trudy is good, but searching for places effected by events somewhere else..... It's not an exact science. They haven't even informed the police yet."

She was sat in George's office, placed there almost as a guard, while Lau and Trudy searched an area of Wanstead. An odd looking guard with a baby in her lap, but she had gifts which made her far more dangerous than Rory and his men.

"Should you even be here..... With the child?" Asked George. "I'm not helpless and I've seen dead bodies before. I'm quite capable of getting myself across town to Wanstead."

"We face a ruthless enemy who has already tried to kill Ruby and Olga." Said Eugenie. "Has Trudy told you about the attack on Sir Edwin Fox and his people?"

George actually sat down, he'd been pacing most of the time since she'd arrived. Maybe she shouldn't have mentioned the attack on Foxy's offices in the breakers yard? It was fairly obvious George hadn't heard about it.

"They actually attacked the British security services?" Asked George.

"Yes, though they may not have realised how strong the defences were. There were fatalities among the guards, but they killed one of the rogue Das Geheimnis. Foxy called me and he sounded quite excited by it all. The body is being analysed at an MOD laboratory. So, if they'll attack Foxy.....I'm going to be your shadow for a while."

"Did they go through his files? Foxy has all our personal information."

"No, they left when one of them was killed. The rogue's have suffered other losses, there may only be a few of them left. Foxy assured me that no sensitive data was compromised. One of them spray painted something on the wall behind his desk. Ragnarök in huge red letters. Probably meant as a threat, or a declaration of war."

"Ragnarök..... Are they insane?" Asked George.

"Maybe, according to Kallina the rogue's have never been famous for their mental stability. Dangerous though, which is why I'm not letting you out of my sight today."

Her phone didn't ring, just a text. Trudy with an address and a note to say the package was intact. Their agreed code to indicate that Frank's body had been found more or less intact. A burnt or crushed package was what she'd been dreading.

"I have an address George, they've found Frank's body."

"I'm still worried about Nari's child going with us." Said George.

“Seong will be fine.....I’m more than I seem George and I think our enemies might be in for a shock if they try to attack you. All of us, all the thirteen, have learned to fully use our gifts. Besides I doubt if they’re hanging around near a body they recently dumped.”

Seong went in her carry cot and Eugenie had to admit it, she probably did look like a strange body guard. That could be useful though, being underestimated always gave you an advantage.

“I could go on my own, the driver will be with me.” Said George.

“No, Ruby would never forgive me if you got hurt.”

Oh, the look on his face.

“Me too George, I am rather fond of you. You leapt out of a plane to save Ruby, on a dark night over one of the most dangerous places on the planet. None of us will ever forget that George.”

For an international financier, he was a bit of a softy really. George was smiling at her, a real cat that just got the cream look.

“Come on, we’re going.” She said.

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It was a mistake Kallina never corrected. Few people knew she could transform into Baba Yaga. Of those few, the majority thought she only had real power while in that form. Even most of the thirteen thought of the two separate personas as different people. Baba Yaga acted on instinct, was incredibly powerful and dangerous in the extreme. Kallina on the other hand was a small, svelte blonde with a ready smile and a good word to say about everyone.

They were wrong, all of them except Ruby and maybe Sophie. True Baba Yaga was the big hitter when it came to destructive powers, but there really wasn’t much in it. Kallina as her pretty blonde self, had one big advantage. It was rare for any man to refuse her a favour, often quite large favours.

“You’re sure you don’t mind ?” She asked. “I’m worried you might get into trouble with your boss.”

“Screw the boss.... Hey, are you sure this is the place ?”

Olga had money, though like Ruby, she hadn’t invested it in high priced bricks and mortar. The house was large, seedy looking, rented and in a district of Budapest that was never going to get into anyone’s tourist photos. To Olga it suited her lifestyle and chosen profession perfectly.

“Conspicuous wealth just puts a target on your back.” Olga had once told her.

The young man parked the van in front of the house and then walked round to open her door for her. A gentleman it seemed, a dying breed.

“This is alright isn’t it ?” He asked. “We’re not burgling someone are we ?”

“It’s fine, I told you. Just a friend abroad who needs some of her things. You’ll see, we’re just here to put a few of her things in a suitcase. Then there are a few bags at a hotel to pick up. Unless you need to get back to work ?”

“No, I’m yours for the day, no problem.” Levan replied.

Levan was from Georgia. Reasonably attractive and incredibly easy to manipulate. Best of all he had been driving a decent sized green van when she’d spotted him. Kallina had smiled at him while he was waiting at traffic lights. He was now her unpaid driver and baggage handler.

“This place looks like it’s seen better days.” He said.

“It’s nicer inside.”

It wasn’t and there would probably still be blood on the basement floor. As for the rest of the house ? Olga seemed to view excessive cleanliness as being something for the bourgeoisie. Kallina twisted her hand as though holding a key, which she wasn’t. Her mind felt for the wards in the lock, a little push and the door was open. Levan was wrinkling his nose a little. She rushed him into the house before he could change his mind. There was a framed photo propped up on the mantelpiece.

“So, she is your friend..... I recognise you.”

It was a photograph of them all, taken just before they'd left Vladivostok and headed west into North Korea. The sort of picture soldiers took of their unit, though none of them were in uniform. Kallina pointed at Olga.

“That's her, it's her bags we've come to pack.”

“Nice..... Is she seeing anyone.”

Predictable, even though it was mildly insulting.

“Come on Romeo, her cases are upstairs.”

Levan made himself useful, finding two large suitcases and opening them up on the bed. Kallina had a list of everything Olga wanted, complete with which wardrobe or drawer. The first thing Kallina found was Olga's passport at the bottom of her underwear drawer.

“Green boots in the bottom of the wardrobe Levan.” She called.

Again it was predictable. She had been flirting with him for hours. As the cases were closed and came off the bed, his arm went round her waste. He looked alright, actually better than alright. Kissing him definitely wasn't a chore.

“Later Levan.” She said. “Once we've packed the bags at the hotel, we can.....Make full use of the facilities. If you want to ?”

“Oh yes, I really want to.”

“Come on then, the hotel is right in the centre of town.”

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“No Rory, I want your team to stay at the Polandrous Foundation.” Said Foxy. “The MOD people are in here now, too many. If I take two steps I seem to trip over one of their tech guys. They're talking about motion detectors linked to body mass rather than body heat. It seems our night visitors have a low body temperature, so our existing detectors ignored them. Actually..... Send Graham back. I desperately need a tech guy who doesn't use pointless jargon.”

Foxy hung up the phone and smiled at Lily. He was a guest in her part of the office now. His office was being given a deep cleansing.

“We have no idea what infections these things might bring with them.”

One of the MOD science people had told him. It had taken a phone call to the minister to stop them emptying his office and incinerating his beloved antique desk and book cases. Foxy had wanted to keep the spray painted message on his wall, perhaps covering it in glass. He'd lost that battle; it was going to be a full repaint and new wallpaper.

“The builders are causing more mess than the Das Geheimnis.” Said Lily. “One was ferreting about under my desk when I was trying to type one of your private memos.”

“They are fully vetted.” Said Foxy. “Even so, if you get that problem again let me know. I'm quite happy to chuck them out of your office for a while.”

Poor Lily, she still seemed a bit shocked by it all. He'd been through it all before though, or something similar.

“The MOD will do what's necessary and then go.” He said. “Soon all this will be just an unpleasant memory. I'm old enough to remember when they found a soviet bug in the wall. That was in the old offices in Curzon Street. I thought the minister was going to have a stroke.”

“I can imagine.” Said Lily. “Can I get you anything ? There's fresh coffee.”

“Yes, coffee would be nice and a few biscuits.”

Lily worried him a little, he didn't want to lose her to the idiots at English Heritage, or even worse, the National Archive over in Kew. The jobs there were likely to be tedious and boring, but they were unlikely to be attacked by creatures scrawling Ragnarök on the wall.

"I do appreciate you coming in Lily." He said. "Quite a few people are using up their sick days until the MOD have done their thing and gone away."

"I'd just get bored at home."

He'd already decided to arrange for a small one off bonus. Nothing huge, government departments weren't into huge bonuses. Enough to give her a nice surprise when she looked at her next payslip. She was halfway to the coffee machine, when she seemed to remember something.

"I called Trudy, she'll be in to pick up the report for Ruby." She said.

"Good, using her is preferable to getting someone local to deliver encrypted thumb drives."

There was something, he'd known her long enough to spot her moods.

"I usually just type everything without really looking at it, but....."

He held his finger up to his lips and nodded at the MOD technician who was running a device over the door to his office.

"We haven't been out to watch the car crusher in a while." He said. "After Trudy has been we could take an early lunch. Take our sandwiches out there and find somewhere to sit. Do you fancy that, watching the car crusher do its thing?"

"Yes, we haven't done that for.....Must be nearly a year."

It was over a year, the last time had been to talk about her wanting to leave. The MOD technicians were vetted twice a year, but not by him. Plus there was a lot of noise starting up about Ruby and the thirteen, even from departments that didn't know who or what she really was. He was still the official gamekeeper of the British security services. It was just that some of the poachers were getting restless.

"Coffee..... And there were garibaldis in the biscuit tin." Said Lily.

"Hmmm my favourite."

Coffee with Lily, sat at one end of her desk, was something new. He never even pretended to understand anyone under forty. If they were all going to turn out like Lily.....The world was going to be in safe hands. Her tattoos tended to be of mythical creatures, a scaly claw was just about visible where she'd rolled up the sleeves of her blouse. To government departments, visible tattoos were on step higher on the list of sins than patricide. Foxy didn't care though. Lily was loyal, trustworthy and intelligent. The writing on the post it note she'd put on one of the garibaldi biscuits was written in flawless Arabic. Not exactly a vague and little used language, but they were both fluent in it.

'We have to keep helping Ruby.'

He screwed up the note, before jamming it into his trouser pocket. He nibbled the biscuit, which was a little stale, but far from inedible.

"Yes, of course we will Lily." He said.

The poachers were circling, most working their own agendas. Even the crowd of cutthroats and misfits down at Vauxhall had been muttering a little.

"These creatures are obviously a threat and this Ruby is one of them. Maybe on our side for now, but that can change. Remember the friendly Taliban and how often they swapped sides. She needs to be watched, that's all I'm saying."

The minister had told him over the secure line, one of the most coherent conversations Foxy could remember having with him. The poison was coming from the vultures in Vauxhall, who resented his oversight of their activities. He'd get Graham to watch the MOD technicians and scan for bugs after

they'd gone. Probably he was being a little paranoid, but being cautious couldn't hurt. One thing he was certain of.....He was going to give Ruby all the help she needed. He'd added a paragraph to the report on the attack at the car breakers. He'd told her about the noisy poachers. He'd told her to watch her back.

"Use Trudy as a messenger for everything Ruby. Tell no one your location, even my people."

By the time he'd finished his coffee, he had to know. She could probably report him to HR for even asking. Lily wouldn't though, she was loyal. Unlike the scrofulous gang of malcontents in their five star palace in Vauxhall.

"So Lily.... The new tattoo. Is it another dragon ?"

Her colourful tattoos had become a shared interest. One that would have been looked at with some alarm by HR, but it was less damaging than a shared addiction for crystal meth. Lily grinned at him, as she rolled her sleeve up, right up under her armpit.

"Wow, another dragon." He said.

The wings were different to her other dragon tattoo, the head a different shape. Foxy had no idea where she went to be 'inked' as the kids seemed to call it. Whoever had created the tattoo was a real artist though, the colours were so vibrant.

"It's a wyvern." Said Lily.

"Very nice."

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George Polandrous had seen most of London, though Wanstead was unknown territory to him.

Wanstead flats he'd heard of, though his driver was taking them to a row of rented railway arches, not that far from Wanstead Hospital.

"This is all unofficial of course." Said Eugenie. "Trudy may have had to erm..... Convince tenants of the arches that they're from the police, or something similar."

The thirteen always made him nervous when they began to use their gifts on the streets of London. They were too damn good at it and there was always that dreadful word in his mind...

Consequences. His driver pulled up in what looked like thousands of other streets in the London suburbs. Lots of white paintwork, bay windows and tidy gardens. Even the gated road leading to the arches looked neat and tidy.

"Not the sort of place you'd expect to find a body." He muttered.

"Probably why they chose it." Said Eugenie.

George's driver had been with him for years, long enough for George to cease worrying about what he heard. He rarely commented on anything other than the weather.

"Looks like we might get some drizzle tonight."

He said, as he opened the door for Eugenie and helped her with the carry cot. Not that he was coming with them. There were limits to what George expected him to see without going crazy. He suspected seeing Frank's body lying in one of the nicer parts on Wanstead, might be too much for his driver. He hoped it wasn't going to be too much for himself. Lau was there, opening up the gate.

"Have you informed anyone yet ?" Asked George.

"Only you George." Said Lau. "Once we tell the police the journalists will arrive."

"It'll turn into a media circus then." Said Eugenie. "You should be on your way home before the police are informed."

"Yes, I can see the sense in that." Said George.



So far Frank Knight was officially just missing, assumed to have run off with some floozy, if there still were such things as floozys in the twenty first century. Finding him dead would change all that and that word began to flutter in his mind like a demented moth....Consequences.

"Trudy is putting together an image of the second male." Said Lau. "There were three of them this time, three rogues."

The private road became quite rural in appearance, with trees and bushes blocking off any view of the street. George heard the sound of a train rattling by, though that too was hidden by the trees and bushes. For somewhere in a busy suburb, it felt strangely remote.

"I know time is limited." Said Trudy. "I'm trying to get a recognisable image of the third rogue, the male we haven't seen before."

He'd seen it before, but it still looked like science fiction, something out of a Hollywood movie. Trudy looked to be at the centre of a web. As her arms moved some parts of the web grew, showing pictures of a rogue Das Geheimnis carrying a body over his shoulder. Another move of her arm and that part of the web vanished, to be replaced by another image from a different angle.

"It won't be high definition." Said Trudy. "I'll get a good image of him though."

Eight people were sat on the hard road surface, seemingly oblivious to what was going on around them. Three women and five men, all staring straight ahead, a vacant expression on their faces.

"Who are these people?" Asked George.

"Three are from a print shop George." Said Lau. "Two were in an archway full of boxes of printer toner and the rest worked in Arch C, doing something or other."

"They'll be fine, we haven't damaged them George." Said Trudy. "No one has been lobotomised, I promise."

"What will they remember?" Asked George.

"When I wake them up, they'll think no time has passed since I arrived." Said Trudy. "I will be staying here after the police are called. Just in case I need to give any of them a fresh dose of whammy."

"Oh, Spider and that word." Said Eugenie.

"Too late, we all call it the whammy now, even Ruby." Said Lau. "Come on George, I'll take you to where they left Frank Knight. It's not nice, something has been nibbling at the body."

"Poor Frank..... No dignity for him, not even in death." Said George.

The road stopped and there was about twenty yards of unused ground before a solid looking metal fence. Waste ground he'd have called when he was a kid. Overgrown with weeds, shrubs and even a few mature trees. It was a good place to hide a body in a large city. Unlikely to be found until someone came to investigate the bad smell.

"Over here..... You might want to keep Seong away from this." Said Lau.

"She's too young for it to mean anything, or remember it." Said Eugenie.

After saying that, Eugenie did keep a few paces back, leaving just him and Lau to stand next to the corpse.

"Christ! It looks like more than one night scavenger found him." Said George.

"Yes, they even stripped him so that nature could get to work on the remains." Said Lau. "I always thought it was a myth that the testicles and eyes were eaten first. Now I know it's true."

That was it for George. He didn't want to contaminate the area around the body. He made it for about twenty paces, before vomiting over a clump of stinging nettles.

"Sorry George, I just wasn't thinking." Said Lau.

"Not your fault.....I'm sure Frank's wife will appreciate having a body to bury. It's just those blood filled holes where the eyes....."

He vomited again and felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Undertakers can do wonders these days George.” Said Eugenie. “You’d be amazed... They’ll have him looking as good as new for the funeral.”

“You’re sure ?”

“Yes I am.”

It was a terrible, grotesque conversation, but it made him feel a little better.

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Kallina hadn’t appreciated being used as a glorified PA. Go to Budapest Kallina and pick up Olga’s things. Go to the hotel and check out the cartel hoodlums while you’re there. Oh, and keep the hotel from making a fuss. She’d do it all and do it well, though she’d do it her own way and have some fun while doing it. Ruby had been efficient, making sure she had the men’s key cards for their room doors and the names they’d been booked in under. She was also genuinely looking forward to sex with Levan; it had been a while since she’d enjoyed casual sex.

“We’ll need to see the woman at the front desk first.” She said.

“Wow, this is a nice hotel.” Said Levan.

A long way from being the best hotel in Budapest, but he was right, it was a nice hotel. The cartel guys were probably getting the bill paid by Olga and had decided to live comfortably. Lots of chandeliers and thick pile carpets, the hotel looked a bit dated, but had a certain charm.

“Let me do the talking, just in case there might be a problem.”

“Why would there be a problem ?” Asked Levan.

“We’ll talk later.”

The grin on his face told her he was enjoying himself, even if he had no idea what was really going on. The woman behind the counter could have been a poster girl for Hungarian tourism. Dark hair, brooding dark eyes and cheekbones to die for. If Kallina hadn’t made promises to Levan, she might have been tempted to.....

“I have their room keys.... Sorry to mess you about.”

Said Kallina, trying to sound like someone who’d been given a thankless job by a tyrant of a boss. Actually, that was how she was currently feeling about being put upon by Ruby.

“I was told their names and asked to pick up their things.” She continued. “Oh..... And to settle the final hotel bill of course.”

Not a good sign, the woman stopped smiling as she used the computer keyboard in front of her.

“We have a credit card associated with those rooms. The duty manager is on his break....I will have to talk to someone.”

Kallina didn’t want to peak too soon with her gifts, the woman couldn’t begin to look drugged or worse, lobotomised. She smiled and used her gifts at fairly low power.

“I mean, we have their keys. Could my friend begin packing their bags ?” She asked.

“If it was up to me.....It’s not hotel policy to.....”

Kallina upped the force of her mental whammy, as Spider now had everyone calling it.

“We do have the keys..... And I promise not to run off or anything.”

“I didn’t mean it like that.....Yes, it is alright to pack their cases. I must get approval though, before you can remove their things from the hotel.”

Kallina gave the key cards to Levan, who wasn’t a fool. He winked at her and headed towards the elevators. Now she just had to put the fluncheon on the woman behind the desk, as Sarah called it. Kallina wasn’t sure if she preferred whammy to fluncheon, they both sounded dreadful.

“Could you tell me the name on the credit card you have ?” She asked.

"I'm sorry, it's not hotel policy to give out that kind of information."

Ruby had given her one of her untraceable prepaid credit cards, with enough cash on it to pay for half the rooms in the hotel, for a year. The trick was going to be making the woman accept the payment. Kallina smiled and touched the back of the woman's hand. There was no attempt to pull her hand away.

"I really do want to settle this bill and join my friend for a while.....I'm sure you understand, as the room will be paid for."

Now or never, Kallina hit her with her fluence at about half full power.

"He's very handsome..... You could join us later..... If you wanted to."

Manipulation or genuine lust for the woman ? Afterwards Kallina was never quite sure.

"Yes, that would be nice.....Later, after I go off duty."

Kallina used a wallet. Women who fussed over purses and bags annoyed her. She took the prepaid Visa card and offered it to the woman.

"Please settle the bill with this card."

"Of course."

"I don't even know your name."

"It's Hanna."

The card took a while to authorise and Hanna either forgot to ask for ID to back up the card, or had decided not to ask. They talked for a while, only stopping when a couple arrived to check in.

"I'll see you later." Said Kallina.

"Yes, about lunchtime."

Everything was going fine, she had everything Olga needed and would soon have the men's belongings. She actually smiled at a complete stranger as she entered the elevator. As she came out the elevator she knew something was wrong.

"He should have been safe here." She mumbled.

Ruby was never cruel, though there had been a few words about her lack of focus. It wasn't deliberate, her head seemed to fill up with background noise some days. She's assumed there'd be no threat at the hotel and she hadn't used her gifts to keep an eye on Levan. Thinking about Hanna had filled her head, thoughts about pleasure and lust.

"I've done it again.....I lost focus." She muttered.

The men had booked two large adjoining suites and Kallina had just felt Levan die in one of them. She should have asked to borrow Sophie, or simply done all the baggage handling herself. It had seemed more fun to find a pretty young man to do that for her. She leant against the corridor wall and emptied all the pointless noise out of her mind.

"There you are."

Just two of them in the suite with the safe where Pablo had put their passports, or at least that was what he'd told Ruby. No other bad guys anywhere else, she was certain of it. Enemies had a mindset, an attitude, especially after killing someone. They lit up in her mind as though they'd fired a flare gun. Kallina checked the corridor was empty, before instantly moving to the room.

"You bastards." She yelled.

Levan was dead on the floor, the two men in suits stood quite near him. Both were carrying guns, so her first move was to paralyse their arms, causing them to drop their weapons. Most of the thirteen were like Ruby, using hand gesture to aim and concentrate the destructive parts of their gifts. Kallina tended to do it all her mind. She glared at the men, while holding them tight in a mental vice.

“He wasn’t part of this.” She hissed. “Levan was just a nice guy doing a favour for a girl he didn’t even know.”

Kallina would have liked to use something biblical as a method of execution, fire was always a favourite. The last thing she wanted was alarms going off, so strangulation would have to do. She gripped their throats in a mental vice and squeezed. Not as satisfying as flames, but there were no screams and nothing to set off the sprinkler system. Once they were dead, she let their bodies fall to the floor.

“Oh Levan, I am truly sorry.” She muttered.

No blood or bullet holes, though his face showed signs of a severe beating. Life wasn’t like the movies, where the protagonists exchanged heavy blows until it became tedious to watch. In real life a few heavy blows could cause brain damage and death. No blood though, not a drop had been spilled in the room. She found the safe at the back of a closet and entered the six digit code Pablo had given Ruby. Pablo, Christophe, Jai etc. All the passports were there, she carefully checked them against the list written in Ruby’s tiny yet flawless handwriting. She knew what had to come next.

“This is going to be fucking hard work.” She muttered.

She needed a list, just in case she lost focus again. Ideally she’d have someone with her to bounce ideas off. Sophie was best and she considered going to Kenya and bringing her back.

“Oh.... By the time I explain everything to umpteen different people.....”

A hand written list would do, on some of the stationery the hotel had thoughtfully provided.

First – Everything goes into Levan’s green van. Bodies, cases and any other crap the guys might have left here.

Next – Check over and tidy up the rooms. One last check for blood stains if there are any.

Next – See Hanna and give her the key cards. Cancel sex and reschedule for another day.

Kallina looked at that line and after thinking it over, she ticked it. Yes, Hanna was worth making a trip to Budapest to see.... Definitely worth it. She was drifting again.

Next – Into the van and park it in a quiet street where no one will worry about it if they see it. Not under any trees.

Next – Take cases, passports and other stuff to house in Kenya. Let them know it’s all there.

Important; don’t get caught up in any explanations, with anyone. Keep focused.

Next – Into the van again. Dump bodies.

She looked at the line for a while and decided the enemies could be dumped in a valley she knew in the Yemen. Miles from anywhere in a part of the world constantly at war. Their bodies would never be found. Not that she knew who they were or why they were in the cartel men’s hotel room. To Kallina such things were almost trivia. They had killed Levan and she had killed them. She adjusted the line on her list.

Next – Into the van again. Dump enemies in the Yemen. Leave Levan in the van.

Next – Set fire to the van.

It wasn't a nice way to dispose of Levan, but it was better than dumping him with the remains of those who'd killed him. The fire would destroy any forensic evidence, but leave his family with something to bury.

"Perfect." She muttered.

Kallina began to go through cupboards and drawers, packing the contents into the men's suitcases. It would be a jumble, but they could sort all that out.

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