

## Ruby 2

### Chapter 14 – Train Yards at Juxingyuan

**“Think of it all as magic tricks.” She’d told them. “Tell people how it’s done and they’ll tell you it’s obvious, now that you’ve told them. They’ll think less of the trick and they’ll think less of you. Our survival is based on being valued !”**

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Max was unhappy, which meant that Sadie was unhappy too. She’d known him for years, knew that he had moods which engulfed everyone around him. She’d been through hundreds of his moods, but she was still unable to ignore him and get on with writing a report to George Polandrous.

“Carry on like this Max and I’ll move out and find a hotel room.” She snapped.

“MI5 ! Load of idiots ! Worst intelligence organisation on the planet.”

She cursed herself for setting him off again. He’d been cursing them since having a meeting with an old friend at that branch of the UK security services. A friend who was now refusing to take his calls or meet with him again.

“You should have heard him Sadie !”

“I know Max, you’ve told me a dozen times.”

“Looked down his nose at me, like I was some sort of bad smell. Not in the UK’s national interest to upset North Korea as this moment in time. Fucking idiot !”

She was getting a Max headache, something still remembered by everyone who’d worked with him at the CIA. Max headache had even been accepted as a reason for a day off, in extreme cases.

“A real put on plummy accent too. Belittle the yank, I know his game..... jerk !”

Crap ! She looked at the report to George and she’d misspelled about a dozen simple words. It was impossible to concentrate on anything once Max built up a head of steam.

“It’s their playground Max. If the Brits don’t want to arrest them, we aren’t going to persuade them.”

He was right of course, it was madness to leave a team of heavily armed agents of North Korean security, in a house in Cricklewood. Larch Road to be exact, a quiet street of terraced houses not far from the Broadway. It had been a triumph to follow the agent there without being seen and they were now following him every night. The good agent, the tough looking one, had been to reconnoitre Sarah’s apartment the previous evening. Things were beginning to heat up.

“We agreed.” She said. “To protect the kids in Sarah Simmon’s flat. We’d watch them and do nothing unless they seemed threatened.”

“Imran and Isobel.” Snapped Max. “They have names.”

He was worrying her, his moods seemed worse since his time wherever Baba Yaga had been holding him. Max used to be the perfect warrior, nothing affected his focus on the mission. Now he could switch from warrior to neurotic auntie in a heartbeat.

“We know the guy in Marseille was prepared to blow himself up.” Said Max. “That ups the ante by a hell of a lot.”

She knew what was coming and didn’t like it one little bit. Kallina or Baba Yaga, or whatever Max was currently calling her, had appeared about midnight the previous day. Max had been full of new purpose since then.

“The Brits will hate us !” She said. “When do you want to do it ?”

"This afternoon at about three pm." He said. "They won't be expecting it. What do strangers knock on the door about in London ? What are they selling ?"

"Same as in America I guess." She answered. "Religion, trying to get you to change your energy supplier. The usual crap."

"Good ! Pick one and you can knock on their door."

She'd finish the report to George later. Sadie pulled up an internet browser and began to do a little research on religions that knocked on doors in London. It appeared there were quite a few to choose from.

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The train had clanked and rattled its way south. Down valleys, across bridges that any nation would be proud of, the railway was the only route through the mountains. The scenery was beautiful and no one had disturbed their nest among the boxes and crates. Eventually in the early evening, the train crossed a river and carried on beside a road. Not a major road, just two lanes, but it was the first road they'd seen for two days.

"It's the G303." Said Trudy. "Not far now, we should prepare to leave the train."

"Are you sure ?" Asked Serge.

"Trust her, we're almost there." Answered Lisa.

"Good enough for me." Said Terry. "Ok, pick up everything and I mean everything. Not even an empty food wrapper left to show who was on board. Clean as a baby's behind !"

Serge could see less and less through the gap in the door, but he knew that the kids were different. They saw in wavelengths he could only guess at and they saw the magnetic fields around living creatures.

"Like dolphins and sharks, but we're far better at it." Ruby had once told him.

He trusted them, the three not quite human kids, as they muttered to one another and pointed through the wall of the carriage.

"Another mile." Said Trudy. "The train won't stop, we'll have to jump when it crosses the junction."

"They'll slow down for the points." Added Roger.

"How slow ?" Asked Matt.

The kids looked at each other and muttered in their strange personal language.

"No more than fifteen miles an hour." Answered Lisa.

"Jump and roll it is then." Said Terry. "No one said this was going to be easy."

Serge helped Terry pull back the door, looking out into a landscape getting darker by the minute.

The sides of the track looked to be nothing but pebbles, not the best surface to land on at speed.

"When did they begin using their own kid speak ?" Asked Terry.

"Only a few months ago. They seem to come to a conclusion quicker if they talk like that."

"I'm impressed."

He could see two faint red dots of light, some kind of warning lights on a junction box. The points to let trains into the sidings and they weren't far ahead. Trudy was shoving past him, peering into the night.

"Wait until we're across the junction." She said. "I'll tell you when to jump."

"You heard the lady." Said Terry. "Get lined up and ready."

Serge was aware that even with a few superpowers, they were still young and unused to the world.

He found himself holding Trudy's hand.

"Are you going to be ok ? I know you've been through a few tough guy courses, but the real thing is always different."

“Thanks Serge, I’ll be fine and the others. We’re really a lot tougher than we look.”

Their train had never reached much of a speed since entering the mountains. The gradients could be wicked, often struggling to climb up to a pass, only to spend the next hour using the brakes on the way down. The locomotive crossed the points and slowed down even more to take a tight left hand turn in the tracks.

“Almost there ! About ten seconds !” Said Trudy.

Darkness now, almost complete, just the two tiny red dots of light at the points. They went past those and the front of the train was well past the turn. More braking and the sound of metal wheels rubbing hard against the rails.

“Now ! Jump !” Shouted Trudy.

Two large bags of equipment were thrown out first, no one wanted to be carrying them while trying to roll over on pebbles. Terry went next, with Trudy just after him. Serge jumped fourth, just behind Matt, the ex-soldier from somewhere in Yorkshire. He hit the pebbles hard and rolled, coming back onto his feet and running forward a few paces. As he looked back at the train, he saw sparks coming from the brakes, as the locomotive struggled with a descending gradient after the turn. The driver was good, but then again, it was likely to be his regular route south.

Serge helped Trudy to her feet and looked around for the others. No shouting, no panic, just a few people muttering as they found each other in the dark. There would be guards at the sidings, not many, but keeping fairly quiet was essential.

“Rumours of the place being haunted keeps the locals away.” Ruby had said. “And it’s miles from anywhere. Twenty bored conscripts as guards, maybe less.”

They grouped in a circle round their belongings in the dark, no twisted ankles, damaged knees or broken equipment. It was almost miraculous, none of them had so much as a broken fingernail.

Terry dug around in one of the large bags digging out two hand held Geiger counters.

“Scintillation counters they call them these days.” Said Terry. “Set for quiet mode, tricky in the dark.”

“We can see hot spots and take you around them.” Said Lisa.

“What the hell did we come to blow up ?” Asked Matt.

They were all looking at Serge, yet he knew no more than them. He thought Terry would have more detailed orders, but it seemed he hadn’t a clue about their target.

“Blow up the train was all they told me.” Said Serge. “Super important to make a big flashy explosion.”

“Only train in the sidings.” Added Terry. “I had pretty much the same orders.”

Roger knew about the place of course. Quiet Roger who actually read up on where he was going and remembered what he read.

“The sidings were put here for the war in the fifties.” He said. “China sent men and materials south to help North Korea fight the south and their American allies. Then it was used to help the north rebuild. Now China seems to have decided that selling cheap electrical goods to America, is better than fighting them. These sidings haven’t been used much since the seventies.”

“So, what’s on the train ?” Asked Terry.

Roger was looking at Lisa, who was looking awkwardly at her feet.

“I read a few things in the box that Kurt sent to Ruby.” Said Lisa. “It’s best if you see the train for yourselves !”

“Simpler and quicker than explaining.” Said Trudy.

Trudy led, which seemed natural. She was the obvious leader of the three kids and they seemed to know their mission objective. They followed the branch line, as it descended into a valley. There was

little growing beside the tracks. It looked as though anything trying to grow was blighted by something.

"There !" Said Trudy. "The lighting is poor, which will help up."

It was there below them, a natural amphitheatre in the mountains. The Chinese military had used the one area of flat ground for miles, as a martialling yard for the war in North Korea. It had to be immense; rails went off into the darkness beyond the four well-lit areas.

"According to Kurt." Said Roger. "There's no CCTV, no sensors and no dogs. Just a few guards who tend to stay in their huts at night."

A group of three wooden huts were in an oasis of light, off to the left of the sidings. Two more pools of lighting lit up buildings to the north of the huts. Maybe their generator, maybe just storage areas, it was impossible to be sure. The one train was in the centres of the rail yard and even from a distance, it looked old. It was reasonably well lit, but there were areas of shadow that would help anyone wanting to break into the train.

"Make something important look like no one cares about it." Said Terry. "Clever trick."

Trudy took them down the side of the valley and into the shadows. Silently they crossed the rail yards, stopping just twenty yards from the train. The guard's quarters were a good quarter of a mile away and showed no sign of activity.

"The guards seem fairly useless." Said Matt.

"There is radiation here." Said Trudy. "Enough to kill if we stay too long. Come on, Kurt said the train isn't locked."

"The carriages don't look like they've moved in decades." Said Serge.

The door was an old fashioned slam door kind and it had been left wide open to the weather. The lighting looked old too, rows of yellow sodium lights on portable arrays. Their dim yellow light was a gift to potential looters, or the curious. There was a body near the door, dressed in a decaying army uniform. His weapon hadn't even been picked up and still lay next to his body.

"A curious guard." Said Trudy. "Don't touch him or his equipment."

Terry had his scintillation counter in his hand, there was just enough light to see the dial. He held it up, showing the needle hovering at the start of the red zone.

"That looks fucking high to me !" He said.

"We just need to get in and out quickly." Said Lisa.

Serge was impressed with the way the thirteen handled themselves. Trudy led, up some steps and into the dark exterior of the train. She turned on her flashlight, none of the carriages had windows of any kind.

"Step carefully." She said. "Try not to throw up dust. The dangerous isotopes are in the dust."

The carriage was some sort of laboratory, obviously not used for a long time. Discarded equipment had been left on desks and tables. There were more bodies, most of them decomposed until nothing remained but bones.

"There was an accident." Said Roger. "Few of the technicians survived. The military just told the guards to keep clear and left the train here. Easier and safer than clearing up the mess."

Trudy kept moving into the next carriage, which was full of technology with United States Air Force stencilled on it. Metal panels, electric motors, circuit boards, all clearly marked as belonging to the United States of America.

"What did they steal from the yanks ?" Asked Matt.

"Not stolen." Answered Roger. "Crashed ! The B52 crashed near the soviet border."

Trudy was already looking into the next carriage.

"Best still to come guys !" She yelled.

The bomb was huge, it filled most of the carriage. Someone had been tinkering with it, various metal panels still littered the floor. Everything had USAF on it and dire warnings about opening up the weapon.

'Danger of Death !' Was on one panel, how right they'd been.

"They lied a lot about yields." Said Roger. "To scare the crap out of the Russians. Talk of megatons was common, but these bombs yielded about five or six kilotons."

"Enough if you're the target !" Said Matt.

"True ! Though luckily none were ever dropped in anger." Said Serge.

Terry was pulling at a wooden desk, which was resting against the door into the next carriage.

"No Terry !" Yelled Lisa. "That must be where the accident happened. The radiation in there will give you a lethal dose in seconds."

He placed his counter against the metal door, watching as the needle hit the stop. Not unnaturally he jumped away, his eyes still on the dial.

"It's not much better in this carriage !"

"I know. We should leave." Said Trudy.

Serge had orders from Ruby. They might have been delivered during the quiet moments after some fairly hot sex, but they were still orders. He was beginning to understand why the explosion had to be impressive. Show the Chinese that their secret from the nineteen sixties had been discovered, show them that nowhere in China was unreachable.

"We have explosive to put in place." He said. "Not a huge explosion, but it will have to do. Unless any of this stuff will still go bang ?"

"Old tech." Said Roger. "All it will do now is kill you by radiation poisoning."

"We can give you an impressive explosion." Said Trudy. "It's why Ruby sent us. Something that will get everyone's attention. We need to get to a safe distance though, a mile at least, preferably somewhere with a little cover."

Serge shrugged at Terry, they were both pleased at not having to spend time planting explosives and timers. Always a dangerous practise, especially in dark cramped conditions.

"Fine." Said Serge. "Any suggestions about where to go ?"

"There's an old tomb to the east." Said Roger. "The one the locals think is haunted. It's far enough and likely to give us cover from the blast."

"Sounds like we're going east guys !" Said Terry. "We're off to visit the local ghost."

They left the old train with its deadly cargo and walked east. There was a fence at the edge of the train yard, but huge holes had rusted in it over the decades since it had been built. Trudy took them up the side of the valley, heading for the place where the local bats roosted. The tomb of the old unknown king, there were hundreds of such places in China. Few had ever been excavated and it might well be a prehistoric burial mound. The bats gave her direction, the warmth of their bodies warming the cave entrance ever so slightly. They used their flashlights once they reached the treeline.

"Surely we're far enough now ?" Asked Terry. "I can barely see the lights at the train."

"Ruby wanted impressive." Answered Trudy. "This far isn't safe..... We go on."

"Leave her to it." Said Matt. "Safer sounds good to me."

"Me too." Muttered someone else.

Dawn was still a long way off when they reached the few stone blocks that marked the entrance to the tomb. Terry sent his people to explore the cave and make sure it would make a safe refuge.

Serge could just see a twinkling light where he knew the train to be, but only if he looked out of the corner of his eye.

"It must be two miles away." He said.

"Good." Said Lisa. "You should put all our equipment inside the tomb and run quickly inside when we say."

"Run before it hits the train." Added Trudy. "Don't stop, don't look back !"

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Ruby hadn't known what to expect at Tumangang. There had been no border checks, no armies of North Korean guards picking through everything. It had almost been like travelling by train across Europe, but the view from the windows was bleaker. Tumangang had a huge train station, with enough rail capacity for hundreds of trains a day. There was capacity but no demand. It was like an old time gold rush town, hoping that someone struck big again. There was a chance that a new regime in Russia, might start supplying North Korea again, it was just highly unlikely.

"Get everything onto the platform." Said Ruby. "I'll find a porter, or a trolley."

They weren't the only people getting off in North Korea. About ten people had clambered off the train, even a woman with two young children. Everyone just stood around looking slightly lost, as people always do on station platforms.

"I think they're heading our way." Said Sarah.

They were, two uninformed station staff, pushing a noisy baggage trolley. There was a woman with them, she had the clothes and manner of a Korean. Without asking, the two men began putting all their bags onto the trolley. The woman smiled at Ruby, while pulling a scarf from her face.

"Kallina ! It's Kallina !" Yelled Charlotte.

It was and Ruby was pleased to see her. She let the others fuss about; while she made sure none of their equipment had been damaged en-route. She'd hoped Kallina would be waiting for them at Tumangang, but it had been doubtful, after Patrick dying. They were no longer aimless arrivals, they were people being met by someone. That helped them blend in, no longer strangers.

"Enough, give her some space." Said Ruby. "I know we're all glad Kallina is here."

"Here to teach us more tricks." Said Eugenie.

"I will." Said Kallina. "First though, I need a word with Ruby."

They walked arm in arm, Kallina leading her towards the two storey office that had once housed a small army of railway staff.

"Is it safe to leave our things ?" She asked.

"Oh yes, there are only six staff on today and I talked to all of them." Said Kallina. "Very gently, they'll do anything I ask for a few hours and will have forgotten all about it by tomorrow."

The others had followed, like an excited snake of school kids on a day out.

"You can't take Delmar with you." Said Kallina. "Murad is bad enough, but Delmar is strong and muscular. His skin can be hidden, but not his physique. They don't do strong and muscular in North Korea."

"I know, but I didn't say anything to him, in case you couldn't get here." Said Ruby. "Can you take him to Sarah's place ? Imran and Isobel might need reinforcements, if they're attacked."

"Yes, but have a word with him first."

"I will."

Kallina entered a downstairs room in the offices, strutting about as though she owned the place.

"Our last lesson will be here." She said. "I have a little piece of magic to make you all look more like typical North Koreans."

It was an empty room, plenty of space for them to walk up and down if they needed to. Kallina gave them just a few minutes of practising their walk, before lining them all up. All apart from Delmar ! Ruby realised it was time to have a talk with him and to her delight, he was quite keen on being taken to Sarah's.

"More likely to get a chance of another crack at the bastards who killed Patrick."

"I need you Ruby." Called Kallina. "Everyone needs to look more Korean, even you !"

Kallina changed, becoming Baba Yaga, the infamous witch from Russian folklore. Her youthful looks became corrupted by immense age, her voice became the typical witch's cackle from every bad TV show. Maybe Baba Yaga had been the first, the model upon which all the clichés had been based ? Ruby wasn't sure, but familiarity had removed any fear of the hideous looking witch persona of her friend. Baba Yaga moved among them, appearing to dislike how everyone looked. She sighed, she muttered, all the time hovering a good inch from the ground.

"A kiss, given and accepted willingly." She said. "That will give you a little of my ability to change, until I take it back again. Another kiss from Baba Yaga, how lucky you all are."

Kallina seemed to be entirely gone, her gentle persona swallowed whole by the more dominant personality.

"Ruby first !" She cackled. "No more shiny hair, no more glittering eyes. I only give my kiss to those that are willing. Will you accept my kiss ?"

A good idea to ask her first, it gave the others an example to follow and Ruby could hardly refuse, even if she was concerned about how she might look after that kiss. Supposing Kallina forgot all about them ?

"I wish to receive your kiss." She said.

"Of your own free will ?"

Oh Crap, crap crap ! Please don't let her forget the kiss to remove whatever she has in store for us !

"Yes, of my own free will."

Dry lips touched hers, crooked teeth pressed hard against her mouth and there was a brief sensation of dizziness. Ruby heard the others gasp. It was an office, there were no mirrors. Her only mirror was the faces of the others and their look of horror and amazement.

"How do you feel ?" Asked Charlotte.

"No different. How do I look ?"

Sophie dug around in her bag and found a makeup mirror. Only small, but she held it out for Ruby to take.

"It's going to be a shock." Said Sophie.

It was awful, horrible ! Yet it was also perfect for what was needed. Ruby looked older, there were even grey hairs in amongst her once glorious raven coloured hair. It was dull now and looked badly cut. Her eyes looked back at her from the mirror, but they were the hard eyes of a stranger. They were the eyes of someone who'd experienced a lifetime of poverty and suffering.

"Did you have to give me grey hairs ?"

Vanity of course ! Even her features had been changed, Ruby saw a citizen of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, looking back at her. The edges of her eyes looked subtly different in a way that was hard to define. Her skin too had a slight change on tone. She looked Asian, but Asian with a Korean twist.

"I hate to say this Kallina, but it's perfect !" Said Ruby.

The others next, Charlotte actually demanding to be next and then shrieking in horror at her image in the mirror. Sarah looked horrified when it was her turn, but gave her willing permission to be altered.

“Oh shit Ruby !” She said. “I’ve never been so glad, to be miles away from a full length mirror.”

Murad was last and there was fear in his eyes. He voiced what they must have all been thinking.

“What if she forgets to reverse it ?!”

Olga was still examining her new Korean look in the mirror and she needed a chance to vent some anger. Murad had just given her that opportunity.

“Don’t be a fucking pussy ! Tell her you want it done.”

“Free will, it has to be of his own free will.” Hissed Baba Yaga.

“Free will my arse !” Shouted Olga. “If I have to look like this, so does he. Get it done !”

It was questionable if Murad really did give his permission willingly. In the end he seemed more scared of Olga, than he was of looking North Korean for the rest of his life. He was altered and then borrowed the mirror.

“It’s not the Asian features.” He said. “They look quite good. It’s just looking so…….”

“Sad, underfed and knackered !” Interrupted Sarah.

There was a lot of agreement. They looked like people who’d been through a hell of a lot of deprivation, which was the whole idea.

“Please don’t forget to turn us back.” Said Sophie.

“I will remember.” Said Baba Yaga. “I did remember to meet you all here !”

She had a point and that made Ruby feel a little better. At the moment, all their passports and Visas were useless. Baba Yaga was instantly Kallina gain, the beautiful young woman, with features that were clearly East European. Where exactly was more difficult to define. Maybe a little more Romania than Russia, it was impossible to be sure.

“I’ll see you to your train, they should have loaded your things onto it by now.” Said Kallina.

The train was on the western side of the station and consisted entirely of freight cars. Ruby had been expecting a few uncomfortable days, but it was still awful to think about it.

“Only freight on this train.” Said Kallina. “But I did add a little gift I’m sure you’ll appreciate.”

The porters and their trolley had gone, after neatly stacking their cases and bags against the wall of the freight car. Kallina took hold of Delmar and vanished, after wishing them all good luck. It was happening, they were on a freight train and heading deeper into North Korea.

“Oh wow ! I love Kallina.” Shouted Eugenie.

It had been placed in a corner, the sort of toilet seen on building sites and at musical festivals. Ruby was pleased too, the alternative had been too horrible to dwell on.

“It looks brand new !” Said Olga.

“And expensive.” Added Sophie.

The train had just begun to move, when Ruby noticed the price tag on the outside of Kallina’s wonderful gift.

‘Chicago DIY - \$1,250 – Inc taxes.’

Kallina had more than likely stolen it, but that didn’t stop it being the perfect present.

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Trudy waited for Terry to say that the first fifty yards or so of the tomb, were open and that nothing unpleasant had set up home in there. Bears were known to live in the mountainous areas of Southern China. She wanted them all to go so that she could focus on what needed to be done, but



they wanted to watch. Of course they did, she'd promised them pyrotechnics that would be seen by most of Southern China.

"Leave the three of us alone." She said. "What we're about to do, needs all our concentration." Serge she trusted, he was allowed to remain close, keeping guard with an assault rifle at the ready. "Just in case an Asiatic Brown Bear, decides to have you all for dinner."

The others though, their minds were so chaotic. Trudy tried not to look into their minds, but it was impossible to spend that much time in such close proximity and not pick things up. Peter had once robbed a bank, another man had quite disturbing sexual fantasies about Lisa. And that was just picked up without really trying. From her rather limited experience of such things, they were what Ruby would categorise as good men. They still troubled Trudy and she needed some distance from the chaos in their minds.

"Sit and hold hands." She said. "We'll go high and see who will lead."

They sat on the dusty ground, all three of them holding hands. Roger Lisa, Trudy, they'd all been through training in how to bring down the thunder, but this was the first time in a real world situation. The soldiers guarding the train would all die, it was unavoidable. Others too, hunters in the woods, people unlucky enough to be travelling through the area. Trudy took temporary lead and took their thoughts up and through the clouds. Right up, further and further until they were at the very edge of space. How beautiful it was out there !

"Begin, two mile wide circle." She said.

The edge of the atmosphere, where the sprites formed that danced on top of thunderstorms. There was energy in that ultra-thin atmosphere and lots of it. No clouds, no towering thunder heads, yet it was where energy was at its strongest. Hot air rose and rubbed against the descending cool air. Such a simple thing, but it rubbed off electrons and produced an electrical potential. Do that billions of more times and you could power a mighty tornado. Do it on the edge of space, where the hot air could rise no further and you could power a mighty weapon. They spun the energy round in a circle over two miles across. Still invisible from the ground, but growing with every passing second. Lisa was best, her control of the circle was best. For a brief moment, less than a thousandth of a second, Trudy let go of the energy and passed control to Lisa.

"More, much more." Commanded Lisa. "I can control it."

Some of what they did with their gifts was explainable, but Ruby had instilled in them all a need to keep everything secret.

"Think of it all as magic tricks." She'd told them. "Tell people how it's done and they'll tell you it's obvious, now that you've told them. They'll think less of the trick and they'll think less of you. Our survival is based on being valued !"

Not that humans could control the energy high up there, but they might think they could. Enough energy to..... Trudy cursed herself for losing focus, her area of the circle was looking ragged. No time to apologise, she felt for electrical potential in the upper atmosphere and pulled it into their spinning circle.

"Go lower !" Said Lisa. "I need it all, every scrap of electrical potential."

She knew the circle had become visible from the ground, when she heard Serge gasp. Like a flaming ring it rotated, visible for thousands of miles. Charlotte was the best of course, but all of them could do it. The name was really rather apt, they were bringing down the thunder.

Still it grew going from flame red to electric blue. Probably it looked less impressive from the ground, but it now held more energy than the fission bombs on the train below. Still only a few kilotons though, they were only two miles from the target.

“More ! More !” Yelled Lisa.

“Careful !” Said Trudy. “We want to survive when it strikes !”

High above them the ring of energy began to shrink in size and like a ballerina bringing her arms into her chest, the smaller it became, the faster it spun. Trudy tidied up a few edges, pulling in a few energy spikes, adding them to the spinning circle. It was hot now and creating its own magnetic field. Soon it would become uncontrollable, Lisa began to let it fall.

“Get inside Serge.” Said Trudy. “This will be bigger than I thought, much bigger. Get everyone into the tomb.”

Down came all that energy, spinning fast now, turning at thousands of revolutions a minute. Feeding as it fell, agitating the atmosphere, adding yet more electrical potential. It burned the air, turning any humidity to vapour. Trudy didn’t have time to look, but she knew it would look like a rapidly descending column of flame. She still sensed Serge, still there, still protecting them in the best way he knew how. No time to shout at him, the hell they’d created was descending at some speed.

“Tidy up that flaring !” Ordered Lisa.

It was pushing air in front of it, warm moist air, Trudy felt it on her cheek. Lisa was leader though, she’d tell them when the energy was guaranteed to strike its target.

“A minute, maybe less !” Shouted Lisa. “Run !”

Crap ! What had they created ? The likely yield was staggering, off the scale for any kind of safe proximity at just two miles away. Trudy grabbed Serge as she ran, pulling relentlessly at his arm.

“It’s huge Serge ! Too much, we need to get deep inside the tomb.”

Panic is contagious, there was no need to tell the others to run. Everyone was still running, a good fifty yards from the entrance, when the thunder came down on the rail yards of Juxingyuan.

Everything shook, as though an earthquake was occurring. Over a megaton, it had to be. Safe distance was likely to over twenty miles. They were too close and so were a lot of other people.

Roger would know, he had near encyclopaedic knowledge of every village in the area. There was a lot of dust, most of it falling from the ceiling of the tomb. Nothing had collapsed though, no sign of fallen blocks of stone, no screaming people. Slowly Terry was getting his men to check each other for injuries. Flashlights were being aimed back along the tunnel.

“Now that..... Was fucking impressive !” Said Matt.

“I can’t wait to see what’s left of the train yard.” Said Serge.

“Use the counters.” Said Trudy. “There was a lot radioactive material on that train and now it’ll be in the dust outside.”

Carefully watching the dials on their scintillation counters, they left the tomb and surveyed the damage they’d caused.

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They’d done their homework on Larch road. The times neighbours were likely to be around, access to back gardens and other useful information. Three pm was perfect, the kids were still at school and little old ladies were busy making tea, before settling down to watch daytime TV. Burglars came at night, everyone knew that. Clamber over a garden wall at three pm and you had to have an honest reason to be doing it, right ?!

“Damn leg.” Said Max. “You’d better give me a full five minutes, before banging on their door.”

Sadie helped him up onto the top of the five foot high wall and then picked up the bible she’d been carrying. It was just to add authenticity of course, Sadie was a hard core atheist.

“You should have chosen the front door.” Said Sadie.

“No, you’re much prettier. I bang on a door and people reach for something heavy.”

He dropped into the garden, knowing that the people who lived there, didn't get home until six thirty. He stepped round their fish pond and shoved one of their garden chairs against the wall on the other side of the garden. That was the house where the Koreans were living, second house from the end of terrace. No barking dogs, no nosey pensioners coming out to yell at him, things were going well.

Max's leg hurt, it gave him almost constant pain since he'd returned from the Yemen. The good thing was that the pain seemed to get no worse, if he pushed past the pain. He stood on the back of the chair and used arms and legs to clamber onto the brick wall. A good solid old Victorian brick wall, none of the modern wooden fencing that lasted five minutes. The wall was probably well over a hundred years old and good for another hundred. He peered over the other side of the wall. Good, no Korean aiming a gun at him. There were some tall plants near the wall, Hollyhocks he thought. He let himself fall in a controlled way, behind the thick green foliage. Max checked his watch.

"Oh, just a minute to go."

No time to rest, he stood up and moved towards the back door. He could see down the passage, right through to the front door. They might see his shadow though, so he flattened himself against the wall next to the back door. He saw a shadow at the door, even heard the bell as Sadie pressed it. A tall one went to answer it, one of the thugs trained in Pyongyang. Max heard Sadie's voice, though he couldn't make out the words. She'd been practising her pitch in the car on the way.

"How important is God in your life?"

He didn't like her patter, trying to shut the door on her. The back door was only single glazed, which had surprised and pleased him. Max picked the lid off the nearby dustbin and smashed it through the window. The guy at the door forgot all about Sadie, as he turned and drew the gun from under his jacket. It looked like a North Korean copy of a Browning, but Max couldn't be certain. Trust was important now and Max trusted Sadie. Max leant in to unlock the door, while the Korean brought his gun up. Before he could fire, Sadie had brought the butt of her gun down on the back of his head. Only after closing the front door though, their battle had to be carried out in private.

No talking, there were still three other men in the house. Running feet, one man coming across the upper floor and down the stairs. Sadie shot him twice before his feet reached the bottom step. No silencers, just a lower than normal amount of cordite in their bullets. Max had even given lectures to CIA students, on carrying out clandestine operations in Western Europe.

"They have no gun culture and most people have never fired a gun. They usually put gunfire down to cars backfiring or some sort on building work being carried out."

Reduce the bangs to more like loud pops and it was unlikely that anyone would be calling the police.

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Sadie entered the kitchen, while Max took the lounge. Kitchen empty, she heard the sound of a powerful hand gun being fired. Shit ! That did sound like gunfire ! Four more loud popping sounds before she can get there and Max has two dead Koreans on the lounge floor.

"Looks like matey here had a Desert Eagle." He said.

"I heard it." She said. "So will half of Cricklewood. Any sign of their boss?"

There was the sound of feet above, in what they knew to be the small front bedroom. Max simply raised his eyes upward.

"Be careful." Whispered Max. "The one in Marseille had made a bomb of himself."

They moved together towards the stairs, taking them slowly, guns up and ready.

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