

Ruby V : Machu Picchu

Chapter 10 – The Dig Site

“Cal had heard the conversation; the gun was a present from someone called Foxy. It had come in a large reinforced case. The gun changed things for Cal, turning a minor drama into a crisis.”

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There are probably a variety of different types of fliers, though Eugenie thought they could be put in two groups. Those that thought of air travel as simply a way to get somewhere quickly. Getting from A to B, with no real enjoyment of the whole travelling process. Then there were fliers like Eugenie, who often loved the journey, more than actually arriving. The same really with the books she chose to read. Eugenie much preferred five hundred pages of meandering, to a novel that seemed to think it was a race to get to the final page. It was a good job her personality worked that way, as the journey from Europe looked set to be high on the meandering scale. They were on a local connections airline, Aerolíneas Star Perú, and about to land at an airport she'd never heard of, that was at an altitude of eleven thousand feet. To her it was all a trip full of adventure and wonders. Sadly, Lorenzo was in the other group of fliers, the ones who just wanted to get there.

“I mean, I've never heard of Francisco Carle Airport.” Said Lol. “Have you ?”

“No, but this is the quickest set of connections I could find.”

He scowled at her and she hadn't mentioned the bus journey yet. Eugenie had used the words connection via road, without mentioning two or three hours on a bus. It wasn't her fault, if Lol assumed there'd be a car to meet them, or maybe a luxury SUV. Three hours on a bus.....Probably not that nice a bus. She'd decided to tell him just before their plane landed. Less time for scowling that way and recriminations. Eugenie had booked them into a superb hotel in Huancayo, which she was sure would cheer him up.

“The airport is at about eleven thousand feet.” Said Eugenie. “We should get some great views of the mountains as we come in to land.”

“Great.....I love mountain scenery.” Said Lol.

Sometimes their travel personas connected, sometimes they didn't. Lorenzo had a thing about mountain scenery and so did she. Eugenie wasn't someone who thought you needed to have heaps of things in common with a lover. To her, piles of things in common, sounded quite boring. Lorenzo and her were chalk and cheese, which was usually fun. The seat belts sign came on, about five seconds before the announcement.

‘We shall be landing at Francisco Carle Airport in approximately fifteen minutes.’

The usual stuff about locking trays followed and securing bags, which no one seemed to listen to. Lorenzo was happy, with his iPhone aimed out of the window to get a few pictures of the mountains. There wasn't going to be a better time to see that scowl again.

“We've a bus connection from the airport.” Said Eugenie. “Two hours on a bus.....Maybe three depending on the usual crap those things depend on. I'm sorry Lol, but you really will love the hotel.”

“Great.....Three hours in the mountains sounds wonderful.” Said Lol. “Now I wish I'd brought a proper camera.”

No scowl, he was smiling at her. There were moments when their things in common did overlap.

“Thanks for bringing me, by the way.” Said Lol. “I do appreciate it.....I know you must have been tempted to come on your own. See all your friends....Catch up with the Scoobys.”

Had she been tempted to travel alone ? Lorenzo might be chalk to her cheese sometimes, but she could never remember wishing she'd left him in Milan. Even his scowling face, had an attractive quality. Eugene leaned across and nibbled at Lol's ear, as he was mountain watching.

“No Lol, I can honestly say.....There really never was a temptation to leave you behind.” She said. “Hey.....Leave my ear alone.”

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With Ruby and Sophie both in Paris, there had been no one capable of delving into Liam's mind. Spider had considered the age old favourite of thumping him until he talked. It would make him feel better about the knife wound in his shoulder and be more than a little cathartic, but ultimately pointless. Everything Liam said would need to be verified by one of the wunderkinds. In the end it came down to what to do with a guy they'd abducted, who was then in the boot of a stolen Hyundai. There had only been one sensible option.....

“We need to stash him somewhere until Ruby gets back.” Lily had said. “Or hand him over to the authorities, though there could be blowback from doing that.”

Blowback, that wonderful word used by people in the intelligence community. It tended to mean being hit with unpleasant consequences from actions a long way from being legal. Like where they'd found Liam and why there'd been a dead man found at the same address. Even with DINI kind of on their side, the police would look at the whole matter with a very jaundiced eye. DINI though, they might be useful.

“If we give him to anyone, Ruby will go crazy.” Spider had said. “I'm sure DINI will have somewhere we can keep him, if we promise to share anything useful. I'll call Mateo, I've pestered Seb for a few other things, probably too many other things.”

For some reason torching the Hyundai in somewhere as beautiful as Huancayo, felt like being the Vandals who'd sacked ancient Rome. Liam had gone into a seldom used DINI safe house and the stolen car had gone into a deep lake. Apart from feeding Liam and letting him shower once a day, that had been about it, until Ruby Mason returned.....

“A good idea to involve DINI, just in case things go sour.” Said Ruby. “What is the safe house like ?”

“The usual drab building with a wall around it.” Said Spider. “Totally nondescript.....Two tiny bits of graffiti on the wall, but otherwise.....People tend to ignore walled compounds.”

“Probably why it took them years to get Bin Laden.” Said Sophie.

“Oh, that film about finding him was rubbish.” Said Ruby.

“They usually are.” Added Lily.

The bus was still in Lima, so they'd used two cabs and been dropped off within walking distance of the drab building, with its even drabber surrounding wall. Spider had been there a few times, as had Lily. They'd taken it in turns to bring food for Liam and make sure was alright. Not that either of them had been there that often, Ruby had only been away for about three and a half days.

“There.....The very solid looking door.” Said Spider. “Break through it and an alarm goes off in the local police office. A few minutes later, several heavily armed cops arrive. As safe houses go.....This one is pretty damned good.”

“Safe houses I have known.....One day I'll write the book.” Said Lily.

There was an outside door to the house, which had been bricked up on the inside. It was all about safety. The solid looking door in the wall, was the only entrance to the compound. Spider unlocked

the door and entered. There was a code to enter on a keypad and the rear door to the house could be opened.

“Just two cameras, both of them looking into the courtyard.” Said Spider. “No cameras at all inside the house.”

“No cameras.....No evidence if things go wrong.” Said Sophie. “What sort of people are usually brought here ?”

“Not our concern.” Said Spider. “DINI have done us a lot of favours.”

“Yes, a certain grey morality is the new norm, Sophie.” Said Ruby.

“So, I can’t even ask ?”

“Not unless you’re certain you can handle the answer, dear Sophie.” Said Ruby.

The rear door gave access to a decent sized kitchen, that Spider had left a little grubby. Some washing up had been done, but basically, it looked like the kitchen of a single guy. Like bears who own furniture, was a saying Spider had heard somewhere.

“I’ll get the coffee machine going.” Said Lily.

“Yes, good idea.....Spider can show me our guest.” Said Ruby.

“He’s in the basement.” Said Spider. “It’s very Edgar Allan Poe down there, sound proof walls and plenty of blood stains on the floor.”

“It’s a bit grim, but we had nowhere else to stash him.” Added Lily.

“Show me.....I’ve no intention of using any violence against Liam, but that doesn’t mean he won’t scream. Sound proofing might be useful. Show me where he is, Spider.” Said Ruby.

Sophie remained with Lily, though he wasn’t sure if she was sulking, or just determined to get a cup of coffee. Spider took Ruby down the stairs and into the basement. There was just one locked door with a keypad to enter where they’d left Liam.

“We let him have access to the whole basement.” Said Spider. “After making sure there was nothing he could use as a weapon. It seemed easier to let him wander, than being locked up in a cell.”

“I can see the sense in that.” Said Ruby. “Has he tried to attack you or Lily ?”

“No, not since the knife attack in the apartment block.”

Once through the door, there was the smell of blood. Not a fake smell, Spider knew the smell of blood that been there long enough to stink. It wasn’t the only unpleasant odour; a lot of unwashed bodies had been kept in the cells. The lack of cleaning was probably for effect, it definitely made him not want to spend time in the basement.

“Well.....I’ve seen a few of these types of places.” Said Ruby. “This one is a long way from being the worst. Where does Liam tend to be ?”

“At this time of day.....Sat in his cell, reading.” Said Spider. “Lily bought a few books for him. He seems to like the Spanish version of Madame Bovary.”

“Give me a Stephen King fan; you know where you are with them.” Said Ruby.

Liam had the run of quite a large area, yet he seemed to spend most of the day sat in his cell. Spider was no expert, but it sounded as though Liam felt safe in his cell. Like the hamster Spider had kept as a kid. The cage was always open, but his pet had always returned to his cage to sleep. Liam was there, reading a book as though he didn’t have a care in the world.

“Hello, you must be Liam.” Said Ruby.

“And you need no introduction, Ruby Mason. I’ve seen so many pictures of you.”

Spider wasn’t over anxious about hygiene, or paranoid about picking up diseases. He’d once picked up a tapeworm in Asia and knew that just about everything could be treated. He still cringed when

Ruby sat on Liam's bed. Bed bugs could be harder to get rid of than a telesales call on a Friday night. Still, it was her choice and she was the boss. Ruby smiled at Liam and actually touched his hand.

"I'd like us to be friends.....Would you like that ?" Asked Ruby.

Spider had seen it all and bought the T shirt. Ruby had touched Liam and used her special smile. No matter who had bought his loyalties, he'd be hers now. Spider relaxed a little, knowing Ruby would soon know Liam better than his closest family.

"Yes, I'd like us to be friends." Said Liam. "I was supposed to kill you, in a very public and messy way. Now.....I think.....I'm not sure. Despite all that you did to the children, I'd like us to be friends."

Spider would have had to ask about the children, but he wasn't Ruby. She obviously had her own plan on how to get the most out of Liam.

"Firstly.....And this is important." Said Ruby. "You may not harm yourself. Not today or any other time you're under my protection. Confirm that you understand that."

"Yes I understand. Though.....I know what you did, Ruby Mason."

"Tell me your full name, Liam ?" Asked Ruby.

"Liam Thornton."

"Where were you born ?"

"Barcelona, in Spain." Said Liam.

Spider began to envy the link Sophie had with Ruby. It seemed to him that Ruby wasn't happy with the answer, though he had no idea why. Ruby touched Liam's hand and actually rubbed her cheek against his.

"The truth this time....Where were you born ?" Ruby asked.

"I would never harm you, not now." Said Liam. "The children though.....I'm not supposed to help you. I was born in San Antonio, Texas."

"You don't sound American." Said Spider.

"Yes....Someone has spent a lot of time, turning Liam into something he isn't." Said Ruby. "He isn't lying though, our new friend Liam Thornton was born a Texan."

"I have been taught.....To be a better soldier of the almighty." Said Liam.

Spider had never thought about religion that much. To him it seemed to be made up of people like his two favourite aunts. They went to church on Sunday and sang songs to the God they worshipped. They ate his body and drank his blood, without ever expecting to get a response from above. Crazy people on the other hand.....Mix them with religion and all hell could break loose. For all he knew, Liam might think he had regular two way conversations with the almighty.

"Don't get upset, Liam....Calmly tell me what the almighty told you, about what I do to children ?" Asked Ruby.

"No, I'm just a humble soldier. God talks to the Colonel and he knows all about you."

"Does your Colonel think I'm a paedophile ?" Asked Ruby.

"No, you're wrong again.....We know you're not a paedophile, though that would be bad enough. The Colonel has seen your file and knows what you really are. Feeding on children though, eating the innocent little ones. You can see why I thought you had to die."

Hearing about crazy cults was one thing, but coming face to face with one. Spider felt giddy and a little nauseous.

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"I should have been at the airport." Said Cal. "At least I'd be there, if his flight was delayed. It's the not knowing.....You must know what I mean ?"

“Of course I do.” Said Chris. “You have recently been the target of professional surveillance. The safest place for you to wait is right here, with Constanze on your lap and a fridge full of nibbles.” Cal liked Chris; to her they were now friends. It was impossible to forget that the Chris, who joined her for a takeaway most evenings, had been part of the team watching her. No one had told her why she’d been watched; just that it had been for her safety.

“When is Abe likely to arrive ?” Asked Cal.

Chris used an App on her phone, which Cal had lost faith in. It kept contradicting itself. Everything from the plane from Sweden being two hours early, to being delayed for five hours. Five hours.....That wasn’t a delay; it was like cancelling the flight and having another try at getting to Heathrow. The grubby local bus she’d used in Somalia, had been more reliable than that.

“His flight has landed.” Said Chris. “Allowing for immigration, customs and traffic....Monique should get him here in the next couple of hours.”

“So long.....Everything takes so long.” Said Cal. “I should have gone to wait at the airport.”

“When Abe is here, you’ll forget all about the wait.”

Ruby wouldn’t like it and she was certain to find out. Chris had been given a gun, by a young man who’d turned up on a large, powerful motorcycle. Cal had heard the conversation; the gun was a present from someone called Foxy. It had come in a large reinforced case. The gun changed things for Cal, turning a minor drama into a crisis. Did someone want to hurt her and Abe ? As always, it was the not knowing that caused the dry mouth and the pounding heart.

“I’m going to try and have a nap.” Said Cal.

“Good idea.” Said Chris.

Constanze made sad sounds as Cal lifted her off her lap, so she carried the ancient cat into the bedroom. Constanze went onto a chair, while Cal got comfortable on the bed. The cat would join her shortly, she always did. It was a little like sleeping with a fidgety toddler, but she was now used to sharing her bed with Constanze. Only Constanze didn’t join her.....

“Oh, stop that.....Stop scratching at things, Constanze.” Cal muttered.

Cal had no idea how long she’d been asleep, just that waking up was going to be hard work. She blinked several times and used the edge of the sheet, to wipe the gunk out of her eyes. It was like waking up after a night down the pub, one of Chris’s favourite nights out. The scratching noise continued, but there was Constanze.....Fast asleep on the chair.

“What is.....Making that noise ?” She mumbled.

There was a competing noise, it sounded as though Monique had just arrived with Abe. She could hear her brother’s voice for the first time in months. Strangely, the scratching sound was still grabbing most of her attention. Cal looked at the bedside clock to see the time, but the spinning object grabbed all of her attention and refused to let go. There was someone knocking on the bedroom door.

“Cal.....Wake up, your brother is here.” Shouted Monique.

The spinning thing was metallic, brass maybe; it had that kind of colour. Cal wondered if she was dreaming, when the object grew until it took up most of the space on the bedside cabinet. The clock vanished somewhere, with just the spinning device remaining.

“Cal, are you alright ? Wake up.” Yelled Abe.

Something was glowing at the heart of the device, almost like a moving image. It was a building in the mountains somewhere. It looked so beautiful, the view was so perfect. As Cal inserted her index finger into the device, the bedroom door opened. Monique was there and Abe was with her.

“Sorry.....But.....What the hell is that ?” Asked Monique.

The tip of Cal's finger touched the moving image and for a few seconds, the world went dark. No ancient cat, no Monique, no brother.....Not even the bedroom remained.

It felt more like coming to than waking up. Cal seemed to have been napping.....On a really comfortable chair in a hotel lobby.

"She's awake.....It's her, I know it's Calaso Duale....It's Cal." Said Sarah.

Someone ruffled her hair, before running their hand over her forehead. It was Ruby and Todd was with her.

"Oh, it's her alright.....Just as I saw her in the dream." Said Ruby.

There weren't many people in the lobby and Ruby was wearing a gown loosely over her night attire, a T shirt and tatty shorts. The first question worrying Cal was hardly original and she'd already guessed the answer. It was knowing though, being certain where the hell the device had taken her.

"Ruby.....Where.....Are we?"

"A hotel in Peru, in Huancayo to be precise." Said Ruby. "Kurt came to me in a dream....He said the Fractalis would bring you here. Its value is beyond calculation....I hope you brought the device with you?"

"No, I left it on.....Oh, I do have it."

It was in her right hand, though it had shrunk back to being quite small. Two metal triangles with a metallic cube around the middle. Inside them was a mass of tiny, complex cogs and wheels. It all looked so different, now it wasn't spinning. Cal held it up, offering it to Ruby.

"Cal, that is your way home." Said Ruby. "Keep it safe.....And when it starts spinning again, it will take you back to the flat in Hackney."

"I can't stay here.....Abe is in London." Said Cal. "The Swedish police finally let him out of prison."

It was all so confusing, taking a nap in London and then waking up in Peru. All put in motion by Kurt, who she'd been told had been dead for years. More shocks, as Lily walked into the lobby and actually pointed at her, as if she was a monster.

"You.....You can't be here." Yelled Lily. "Monique called earlier.....You're in Hackney."

"Calm down.....Cal will be joining us for a while." Said Ruby.

"I can't.....Please put me on a plane back to London." Said Cal.

Ruby hugged her and even though Cal knew she was being given the whammy, as Spider called it, it still felt wonderful. Like having all her worries reduced from a seven or eight, to twos as the very most. Abe would be fine; Chris and Monique would look after him. As for all the paperwork for the UK immigration people.....That could wait.

"You are with us until the Fractalis spins again, Cal." Said Ruby. "Call your brother on the phone; I'll get the hotel to find you a nice room. For some reason you're important.....So, you're stuck with us I'm afraid."

"I don't have a passport on me, or any form of ID." Said Cal.

Ruby leant in really close and whispered.

"That's alright.....Spider has friends in the Peruvian secret police. He can talk to them about you.....I'm certain you'll be fine."

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Professor Ellie Nicholas, was Dr Nicholas on social media, though generally just Ellie to the students at the dig site. Despite having a budget so low, it could limbo under a dachshund, her joke. The university had provided her with a couple of decent trailers for the senior staff to live in and a reliable satellite phone. As for the junior staff, the kids who did the bulk of the digging.....They had tents and a latrine pit. It wasn't fair really, but no one had ever said archaeology was fair. Besides,

they were all volunteers and knew what to expect. Her main concern was health and safety. If there was a major accident, it was a hell of a long way to the closest medical facility. When the phone rang, Ellie thought it was her mum again. They'd had words over her choice in men; Ellie's not her mum's. They'd rowed before though and were likely to argue again. Her mum seemed to think her daughter with a doctorate, should marry someone like Baden Powell, or Clive of India. Ellie on the other hand, was going through a grungy, slightly bad boy period. Nothing too extreme, no drug dealers or scam artists, though the latest guy in her life did have a DUI on his record.

"Hi mum, sorry about this morning." Said Ellie.

"Hello, is that Professor Ellie Nicholas?"

"Yes, sorry....I thought.....Yes, this is Ellie Nicholas."

"My name is Sarah Simmons. I can speak Spanish if that helps, or quite a few other languages, if you'd prefer?"

"No, English is fine Sarah, what can I do for you?"

"I'm employed by a lady with a genuine love of Peruvian archaeology." Said Sarah. "I must stress that she's not just a casual tourist, not a looky-loo. My employer has a depth of knowledge on the East European Baba Yaga, though evidence of her presence in South America.....I don't need to tell you how exciting that is."

Ellie had learned that anyone stressing they weren't a looky-loo, usually was one. They didn't have the facilities to look after a rich lady who was being excited by the mention of Baba Yaga. Whoever she was, she'd hate the dig site. A good day was when the latrine pit didn't overflow.

"Can I have a name for the lady you work for?" Asked Ellie.

"She's not someone you'll immediately know, she's not a bored movie star or pop singer looking for a cause. I'm employed by Ruby Mason. I can provide you with financial reports, to prove she deserves to be taken seriously."

Ellie had never been good at the whole sucking up to benefactors thing. She could do it, but much preferred to be at the bottom of a muddy dig pit. It sounded as though Ruby Mason wanted to see the dig site and was about to offer a financial sweetener. Maybe, just maybe.....There'd be enough to do something about the latrine pit. As if to emphasise the need for funds, the lights flickered as the overworked generator seemed to cough, before speeding up again.

"Be honest with me Sarah.....Why would I need to see financials for Ruby Mason?"

"Ruby would like access to the site, for a small group of people." Said Sarah. "Complete access, with your help in understanding what you've found. There will be a significant financial contribution to compensate for any toes trodden on and general annoyance."

"How many people do you intend to bring?" Asked Ellie.

"Under a dozen."

"You'd be expected to bring your own tents, we've no spare accommodation." Said Ellie.

"Yes, not a problem.....We're aware you have a resources problem."

How were they aware? Ellie thought Ruby and her team had probably seen the documents included with the application for a dig permit. The university had given her the lowest budget likely to be acceptable to the authorities. Sarah and her boss might be trying a scam of course. Ellie decided then and there to ask for enough cash to finish the dig in relative comfort. A scammer would vanish, but if Ruby deposited the cash in the bank.....Ellie didn't give a crap about any hidden agendas. It was all probably some spoilt rich girl, looking for a tax break of some kind.

"A ball park figure will do.....How much is Ruby willing to donate to our project?" Asked Ellie.

“We’ll match the funding the university provided. That should make your lives more comfortable and ensure the dig can be completed.”

It was a clever offer. Enough to transform the dig, but not enough to tempt her to empty the bank account and run away to somewhere with palm trees and no extradition agreements. It was enough to buy a backup generator and have some chemical toilets trucked in from Jauja. There’d even be enough to leave some in the bank for contingencies. Ellie’s heart was beginning to beat faster, at the mere idea of not having to worry about fucking contingencies.

“I don’t like to be rude, but I’m bound to be asked about the source of the funds.” Said Ellie.

“Everyone is paranoid about money laundering these days.”

She could hear Sarah muttering at someone, though all she could hear was something about spiders and being handed the blue file.

“Yes, we knew you’d need to ask.” Said Sarah. “The funds will come from an account with the Polandrous Foundation in London. Ruby has a long association with George Polandrous, who I’m sure you’ve heard of?”

“Yes, of course.....If I may ask, how old is Ruby Mason.”

“Ruby is just coming up on her twenty eighth birthday.” Said Sarah.

All that money and links to Polandrous, all at under twenty eight. Part of Ellie hoped that Ruby was a spoiled bitch, who’d been handed it all on a plate. Ellie’s next birthday would make her thirty six and she was still a little ashamed of the flat she rented. Money was money though....Everyone’s cash was the same and it would all buy those chemical toilets.

“Again....I hate to appear rude.” Said Ellie. “I’d have to see cleared funds in the bank, before your party arrived.”

“No problem.....Let me have the bank details and I’ll transfer the money immediately.”

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Ruby had forgotten how good Nazili’s package portal had been. Wrap a packet up in several layers of padding, cover the whole thing in aluminium foil and drop it into the portal. A few seconds later it would arrive close to whoever was earmarked as the recipient. Enough packets had been sent from London to Sophie in Baku, to cover the floor in her hotel room. It had been so flawless, better than the people who delivered the clothes Ruby ordered while in London. She was now having to send encrypted zip files to Malou, who then passed on the contents to a member of Villand’s family.

Actually....Not his family now, it was Mara’s family of undocumented refugees and troubled kids.

“Yeah, it’s a really crap way of getting the information to you, but it does work.” Said Ruby.

“The complexity will add to the security of the method.” Said Mara. “What do you intend to do with the....Main male voice on the recordings?”

“The owners of the property said he can stay there as long as we like, they’ll even feed him.”

“Sounds great.” Said Mara.

Spider and Seb from DINI, seemed to be developing a bit of a bromance. The safe house had been agreed between them, as had Liam being allowed to stay there for a while. Seb had even agreed to have babysitters feed Liam and make sure he didn’t run out of reading material. There’d eventually be a bill for Liam’s food and lodgings, though it wasn’t likely to cost a fortune.

“So....I was shocked, I’ll admit it.” Said Ruby. “What was your reaction to the recordings of my chat with him? I knew cults existed.....But this seems so crazy, so bizarre.”

“Well....There is that joke about quite liking children, but not being able to eat a whole one.” Said Mara.

There was quite a bit of laughter and a few comments that ignored the chance that their conversation was being intercepted and recorded. It was just so bizarre though, an extremist cult wanting her dead....For devouring human infants. Spider had told her it had been used in every world war and was still being used in places like Afghanistan.

"If you want to instantly turn the public against someone.....Mention them doing dreadful things to kids. The more Dreadful the better." Spider had told her.

Of course Ruby knew it happened, but when it was happening not to someone else but to her.....

"You need to take it very seriously." Said Mara. "Religious cults can and have, done some truly barbaric acts. If your God is telling you to do something, there are zero limits."

Todd had said something very similar and Spider had mentioned a few incidents he'd come across while being a member of the British army. It was all worrying and made her glad Eugenie was watching her back.

"Dig about Mara, call in a few favours for me." Said Ruby. "I've had some strange enemies in the past, but never one who wanted to kill me, because their God wanted me dead."

"I'll get my people digging, but you already have a contact with the CIA." Said Mara. "They'll have terabytes of data on all sorts of religious crazies. Religious extremism is in at the moment; their minions can make or break political careers. Call your contact at the CIA, Ruby."

"I know who you mean, but they'll want a little quid pro quo."

"They always do." Said Mara. "And from whispers I've heard, you already owe them a favour or two, because of someone's brother."

"I never asked them for the favour."

"That's how they work, Ruby....You know that. Do you want my advice ?" Asked Mara.

"Of course I do.....That's why I called."

"At the moment your feet are wet from paddling with the CIA. Time for you to leap in and get thoroughly saturated."

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They do say no large hotel is ever completely full, at least not for valued customers. Cal was found a room, though it looked like the room the hotel tried not to give to anyone. Just briefly looking it over, Cal noticed the mini-bar was turned off and the aircon wasn't running. All survivable fairly minor issues, but it reinforced the idea that the room wasn't regularly used by guests. It was obviously 'that room,' the problem room. The one usually left empty.

"We can move you once another room becomes available."

Said the pretty dark haired woman from the reception desk. There had already been mention of the lateness of the hour and a Sci-Fi convention being in town. Ruby had become involved, but even she couldn't magically create another room in a full hotel. Cal had resigned herself to sleeping there, when luck seemed to be on her side. Another employee of the hotel arrived, muttering about the Cheung wedding. The dark haired woman began to smile at her.

"You're in luck.....We've had a last minute cancellation. A really nice suite is available."

Ruby had to agree, she would be picking up the bill. Just as the first rays of morning sunlight were turning the sky red in the east, Cal was shown into her suite.

"Oh, it's beautiful." She said and she meant it.

No shower, Cal undressed as soon as she was alone in her wonderful hotel suite. No clean underwear and definitely no night attire. All that could be dealt with the next day, though it was probably already the next day. Naked as the day she was born, Cal slipped between the sheets of the largest bed she had ever seen.

“Oh, that feels so good.” She muttered.

She’d called Abe from Ruby and Todd’s suite and the conversation was still rolling around her mind. He hadn’t quite believed where she was and being honest....The notion of instantly being halfway around the world from London, was confusing her too. Add on the six hour time difference and Cal was left looking up at the ceiling, unable to sleep.

“Crap !” She muttered.

Cal rolled over and looked at the bedside clock, which had a bright red LED display. She closed her eyes, but didn’t feel at all sleepy. When she opened her eyes, the clock was no longer there. Constanze was curled up on the bedside cabinet. The ancient cat wasn’t sleep, both of her green eyes were open and alert.

“Constanze, you followed me....Good girl.”

The green eyes seemed so hypnotic, as Cal stroked the cat. The situation seemed to become a dream, with Cal still stroking Constanze. Ruby talked about talking to people in dreams, as though they were real. Cal suddenly realised the cat’s green eyes had become the face of Kallina. Had she been stroking the legendary Baba Yaga ? It was odd, but the cat and Kallina seemed to have merged into one living being.

“I have many things to tell you, Calaso Duale.” Said Kallina. “Tricks too.....I can teach you many things before you wake.”

A lot was said, much of it in a language Cal didn’t understand. There was music in the words though, a movement up and down in the tone of Kallina’s voice. It was like a song that became a poem, that became something she had to understand. It was all so important.....

“Cal.....Get up.....It’s the middle of the afternoon.”

Sarah at her door and Cal remembered putting the security latch on her door. No one could get in, which was great, as she was naked. A sheet would have to do; she wrapped it around herself, while shouting.

“Wait, Sarah.....Give me a moment.” She yelled.

Normally it took her two cups of coffee and forty minutes, to wake up in the morning. Someone thumping on her room door and Cal was wide awake in about two or three minutes.

“Let me in.....I bought you some clothes.” Shouted Sarah.

Being yelled at for being in bed too long was something she remembered her mum doing. Some people have recurring dreams about turning up naked, for an exam they haven’t studied for. For Cal, her recurring dreams were all about disappointing her mum. As Cal opened the door, she could feel sweat on her forehead.

“Sorry, Sarah.....Come in.”

“I remembered your sizes from Baku.” Said Sarah. “Just enough to get you out and about. We can go shopping together later on.....Oh, she’s with you. London said she’d vanished, though Ruby wasn’t concerned. She thought the little monster would end up coming here.”

Constanze was curled up, fast asleep, on the chair next to her bed. It was impossible of course, but so was being instantly zapped from London to Peru.

“Constanze.....I’m so glad you weren’t just a dream.” Said Cal.

It just seemed so natural, to open her arms as if to cuddle the cat. Up came Constanze from the chair, floating through the air while still asleep. Cal was hugging the large grey cat, before realising what she’d just done. Sarah was giving her a serious look.

“Thank you for the clothes.” Said Cal.

Sarah stroked the cat’s head, until the familiar motor boat engine, purr began.

“I always knew there was something about you, Cal.” Said Sarah.

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