

Ruby IV : Just A Shadow

Chapter 17 – Villand’s Family

“The Adriatic could do that, calm one moment and a rain storm the next. The rain was fine, it was the swell that was threatening to ram them into the side of the other vessel.”

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Gérard Villand rarely took an active role in the day to activities of what he called his family. It was a large family, growing all the time. At one time all the young people needing a sanctuary of some kind, had been migrants. Most of those had probably been from North Africa, though he’d never kept records, for obvious reasons. The world had changed, those in need had started to arrive from the east, the new European countries. Most were countries that had been part of the Soviet Union. Sometimes it felt to Villand, as though whole nations were lost, or confused without someone telling them what to do. The young people looking for food, shelter and protection, were now called Dimitri, or Ivanka. Rather than Hakim or Samia. The problems they arrived with were the same though.

“This one has been beaten.” Said Villand. “My instructions were clear, no physical violence.”

“We tried our best.” Said Mara. “He refused to come without a fight.”

They were in a warehouse rather than a derelict building. A clean and well-lit warehouse owned by a freight forwarding company. Not his company, Villand prided himself on having no traceable assets. The warehouse and the freight company were owned by someone from the old days, who owed him a favour. A lot of people owed him favours; it was why he was so good at finding out information. He sat in the office chair Mara had provided for him, enjoying the way it was easy to spin around. He glared at the first man tied to a chair, before spinning around to glare at the second. They knew who he was, which meant they knew he had a reputation for being merciless if the situation required it.

“You’re the best they had ?” He asked.

Both of them had duct tape over their mouths, so his question was largely rhetorical.

“They were well armed.” Said Mara. “Two guns each and the guy in the blue shirt had a dagger. A serious blade, the sort soldiers carry.”

Only Mara was allowed to speak without permission. A large number of his family were there, lurking between the pallets of tinned vegetables, keeping to the shadows. He’d wanted them there to not only see their enemy face to face, but to also know their enemy could be beaten.

“Which of the two is the boss. Mara ?” He asked. “No, forget that, which is the clever one ? There’s always a clever one.”

“The one who fought back, the guy with the bruises.”

Getting up made him grunt, though Villand thought he had nothing to complain about. Most of the ex-DGSE people he’d known were dead and not always from old age. There was a table where Mara had put everything the two men were carrying, or had in their car. Guns, quite a bit of cash, phones that were now deactivated, knives and a small cosh that was heavy and capable of inflicting quite a lot of pain. He picked up the cosh.

“Remove the tape from their mouths.” He said.

Young Aria did it, with a smile on her face as both of the men winced. Worse than waxing off a bit of stubble, or so he’d heard. He knew where everyone was, he’d been watching the faces of his family.

Jānis was from the east, a huge young man. He was wearing the almost obligatory jeans, trainers and worn-out T shirt. It seemed Jānis was a Van Halen fan, or someone had given him the T shirt. When they'd needed a washing machine moving from one building to another, Jānis had picked it up by himself. Yes, Jānis would be perfect.

"Jānis....Come and take this cosh." He said. "I have a job for you to do."

Mara looked disappointed; she'd obviously hoped to be the one to give the Gallaan people a well-deserved lesson in good manners. Not this time, he couldn't always favour Mara, even though he did love her like a daughter. Jānis took the cosh from him and smiled. No one in the room could be unaware of what was likely to happen next. Despite having their mouths untapped, neither of their prisoners was saying anything. Villand turned his attention to the smaller of the two, the young man Mara thought was the clever one.

"I will ask you some questions." Said Villand. "Tell me something I know is a lie and Jānis will hit your colleague. Refuse to answer and Jānis will hit your colleague. If you look at me insolently.....I'm sure you get the idea. We'll start with an easy one that we both know the answer to. Who are you working for?"

"Screw you."

Villand abhorred torture, he'd seen the victims of it in Algeria. His family needed a little payback though, for being followed around and generally harassed. It wasn't about the questions; he knew all the answers already. It was all about who had control.

"Not his head, Jānis. Never the head, hit his left arm.....Hit him hard."

The cosh was long, with a widened business end. Heavy, the last third of it was probably filled with lead. It didn't look much, but in the hands of someone as strong as Jānis, it could easily kill someone. The man in the blue shirt screamed after Jānis hit him. A real scream, a serious scream that hinted at cracked bones and damaged sinews.

"Alright, we work for the Gallaan Group. You did kill one of us, we had good cause to harass your people a little."

"He was armed and hiding in one of our locations." Said Villand. "Do that kind of thing and dying becomes an occupational hazard. Let's carry on, shall we..... Who do you report to at Gallaan?"

"You know I can't tell you that."

Jānis had the cosh ready, keen to hurt the men who'd been causing problems. One had followed Mara home, which should have been impossible. She'd loved that apartment and now she was in a grubby building on the other side of Paris. Gallaan hired good people, so things were likely to get worse. Villand needed to send them a message and a guy in hospital with a few broken bones, made a pretty good message.

"His.....Right shoulder this time, Jānis." He said.

There was a definite sound of a cracking bone, as the cosh landed. Jānis had to weigh close to two hundred pounds, all of it muscle. Add on the strength behind the blow.....The man in a blue shirt didn't pass out, but he probably wished he had. He yelled a lot, before beginning to sob.

"There are over two hundred bones in the human body." Said Villand. "I have nowhere else to be right now. We won't hurt you, but can you watch him die.....Blow by blow."

It's not easy to hear someone else scream, when you could stop it. Villand knew, he'd been on the wrong side of interrogation on more than one occasion. According to the legend, he'd never talked, but he had. Eventually everyone talks.

"Alright.....We report directly to Nick Teems their head of security. Or rather we did, they've had a huge disaster of some kind in Norway. They've cut us adrift a little, just carrying on with what we

were doing. I was told Nick might be heading out to Norway.....I'll tell you anything, just stop hitting Richard."

Norway was something Villand didn't know about, he'd make sure the information went to Ruby's people. Everything else he knew already, but he had to make a point of questioning the clever one for an hour or so. When he was finished he had blue shirt, Richard, sedated and put into the back of a van. Before the clever one joined him, there was the message for whoever needed to hear it at Gallaan Industries.

"I tend to be neutral in most things, tell them that." Said Villand. "Within reason I sell information to everyone, though I've turned away a few terrorist groups. Playing both sides some would call it, but it has worked well for a very long time. I have good people and a lot of contacts in organisations Gallaan wouldn't want to annoy. Leave my people alone or you'll get a war you can't win....Will you tell them that?"

"Yes, I'll tell them."

"Good..... Now Jānis will hit you once, just so you remember."

Villand had left the choice to Jānis, who landed the cosh with some force. Clever guy's left knee, which made him yell quite a lot. Not for long though, the sedation put him into a drowsy, pain free state.

"Drop them near the hospital, Mara." Said Villand. "Somewhere easy to see, then make a phone call."

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Jalil had been killed several years before. Known as the fixer, he'd been killed for helping her. One of his sons had died too, though that had been unconnected with her. Life could be dangerous in Azerbaijan and Ruby tended to rely on those who were usually on the edge of polite society. Not necessarily criminal, but those who weren't over worried about an enterprise being completely legal. Jalil's extended family still lived in the Bilgah area of Baku, including a grandson called Sanjar. He drove a taxi, a copy of a London taxicab that had been manufactured in China. Baku was like that, to Ruby it was all part of the charm of the city. Todd was taking off a set of ear defenders to moan at her again. He'd been moaning at her quite a lot, all of it meant to help.

"Actually, that was pretty good." Said Todd. "Amazing really. See, you can do it when you concentrate."

"I get angry at myself and focus that anger." She replied.

Two phone calls was all it had taken to get an invite to the house in Bilgah. Sanjar lived there now, with several cousins and his wife. It had been strange to see the house again, though all her memories of the house were good. Sanjar had arranged it with one of his friends and, as if she'd known them all her life. They'd given her the use of a basement firing range in Gobustan. All very secret and she hadn't asked who normally trained there. Todd was reloading a Glock, her Glock 32 with the altered grip. They'd been on too many major airlines to bring personal weapons from London, but there was Nazili's portal now.

"There you go, fully loaded...Twelve in the clip and one ready to go." Said Todd. "Get angry and fire them all at the centre of the target. I want a nice tight grouping."

Ruby could have simply waved her hand in the direction of the target and burned it to a crisp, or crushed it beyond recognition. That wasn't the point of it all though. Her training was all about a huge 'if' that she hoped never occurred. What if her gifts suddenly failed? Ruby thought about something to make her angry, mainly with herself. She remembered the death of Lucy Forbes, on a

London street, all those years ago. She fired without really being conscious of emptying the gun at the target.

“Wow, that is just about perfect.” Said Todd. “Just one shout outside of the grouping. Even I get that, occasionally. What did you think about ?”

“The car crash and Lucy dying.” She replied.

“That was a long time ago, Ruby. Not really your fault, from what you’ve told me.”

It was one of those dreadful memories that her mind kept replaying, over and over. In the end her thoughts overlaid the genuine memory, until she was unsure what had really happened that awful night. Had they driven into her car, or had she collided with them? She’d been lost, that much she was certain of. Her driving the old Ford Focus that was constantly letting her down. Beside her had been a very drunk and scared Lucy, her best friend. Behind her had been Kurt and Kallina in a huge saloon car, a Mercedes she remembered, though she was unsure. It had definitely been a large, heavy vehicle.

Kurt had felt her gifts and wanted to help her, but she hadn’t known that. Two people in a car, chasing after her on a rainy night. She’d been terrified, hurtling along narrow streets at ludicrous speeds. That dreadful old car of her had let her down again, the engine dying. Her car had stopped on a dark street in E1. The insurance people had sent her so many letters, she was certain it had happened in London, E1. It was the electrics; the problem had always been the electrics. Her old Ford had died on her, even the lights had failed.

They’d driven into the back of her car, while travelling at speed. Ruby remembered her Ford rolling, over and over until it hit a wall. Everything had been thrown about inside the car, though her injuries had been fairly minor. Kurt had kissed her before Kallina had persuaded him to leave. That kiss had given her gifts the jolt they’d needed. In a way, that accident had been the last time she’d felt totally human. Her main memory of that dreadful night hadn’t been that kiss. It was looking out of her crumpled car at a bundle of bloody clothes in the road and realising it was Lucy in her favourite dress.

“Yes, I know it’s an unhealthy thing to dwell on.” She said. “Please don’t give me a lecture about it.”

“No, not at all.” Said Todd. “If it helps you shoot like that, keep using it.”

It was the sort of thing Jurgis would have said, poor dead Jurgis. Use whatever you can, anything, nothing is unthinkable or off the table.

“Honestly, you don’t think it sounds a little crazy ?” She asked.

“Maybe just a little.” Said Todd. “You seem pretty sane to me though, or as sane as any of us are. Right.....Let’s try that again and see if you can get a perfect grouping.”

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Calaso wasn’t just bored with being stuck in the hotel all day, she was fed up with being constantly treated like a child. Ruby deciding they needed a hotel after being on the Antonov for days, had been a wonderful surprise. Room service, a shower she could stand under for half an hour, if she wanted to. Clean sheets and a bed that wasn’t just memory foam over a metal floor. It was all delightful, until she’d decided to go for a walk around Baku. After getting her nails done of course and her hair tidied up a bit. Cal had been feeling over the moon, until her jailers had arrived. Sophie was the ringleader and it was obvious she was being watched. Her brother was there too, in full fussing mode.

“It’s not safe to walk around the town on your own.” Said Abe.

“If you like, I could come with you ? I know a few decent shops.” Said Sophie. “We could buy some new clothes.”

The new clothes were some sort of bribe, to get her to behave. She'd mentioned wanting to go for a walk earlier and had seen their reaction. If she'd had her own special gifts, they'd have let her go out on her own.

"I want to go out on my own." Said Cal. "Not far, just to the park. I can see it from my window."

It was if she'd asked to join a biker gang and mug old ladies. Sophie didn't know her, not that well. But the number of times she'd covered for her brother, when he'd wanted to sneak out of their home during the night.

"No, it's not safe for a young girl to go out alone." Said Abe. "Go with Sophie, or ask Nari to go with you. I know you like Nari."

It would pass, but at that moment, Cal hated her brother. An idea was forming though, a way to avoid being imprisoned in the Baku Marriott for the duration of their stay. There were lots of eyes available to watch her in the hotel, but there'd only be Sophie's at the clothing stores.

"Alright, some new clothes would be nice." Said Cal. "Ruby said they have a Hard Rock burger place here. Can we go there after the stores?"

"Yes, it's in Fountain Square, not that far from here." Said Sophie. "I've been there before and the burgers are amazing."

Her brother fussed a little more, of course he did. Sophie began promising more trips to the Hard Rock, as they left the Marriott. All that filled Cal's mind was how to give Sophie the slip and see the city on her own. Play nice until Sophie trusted her, then out of a back door somewhere. How hard could it be ?

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The merchant ship Volos was fairly typical of shipping in that region; the Adriatic and anywhere within a thousand miles where someone needed freight moved from one port to another. Greek owned and registered in Panama, even the captain was typical. George Papageorgiou was a Greek Cypriot who'd decided to return to his spiritual home. A small apartment in Athens, a wife and two daughters. Plus, after years of moving up the ranks, he was Captain of the Volos.

Typical, so damned typical his life was boring. George often thought he'd only started doing deals as a side hustle, to alleviate the boredom. There was the money of course, that was useful. Two daughters could be expensive, especially as they both seemed to have found young men they wanted to marry.

"No, too fast." George Yelled. "Bring us alongside slowly, or we'll have damage to explain when we dock."

"Sorry, it's this rain and the swell." Said Farid. "The forecast was dry, with a calm sea."

"Never believe the forecast." Said George. "Bring us alongside carefully and we'll be fine."

The Adriatic could do that, calm one moment and a rain storm the next. The rain was fine, it was the swell that was threatening to ram them into the side of the other vessel. Not a dedicated container ship, most of the cargo was still in boxes and crates in the hold. Containers went on the deck, where the rain was making them wet and difficult to handle. His crew were good though and he hadn't made the mistake of being greedy. He was going to be paid serious money for swapping a few containers and so would his crew. Not that he knew who was paying him. As usual it was all going through an intermediary, an agent. There was a definite clang as the Volos nudged against the side of the other ship. Whoever was steering the other ship was a pro, they hadn't moved away after the scrape.

"Oh, Farid." Said George. "How long have you been doing this job ? You're always telling me, but just remind me."

“Thirty years boss.....It’s the weather.”

“Yeah, I know.....Scrapes we can explain, but not dents. Be careful.” Said George.

George had never heard anyone say it was impossible to transfer containers at sea, it was just that no one ever did it. Not entirely true of course, as his crew had done it quite a few times. There had been a broken arm once. Cash had taken care of that grievance; the man had gone along with the story George had invented. A wet deck and hurrying because of a minor emergency had been blamed. His crew were still keen, they were now used to his deals bringing in extra cash. He was paying them three or four times their official pay, so they were keen and loyal. As long as no one actually died, they’d accept minor injuries as an occupational hazard.

“That’s as close as we’re going to get, boss.” Said Farid. “I can keep us at this distance as long as the weather doesn’t get worse.”

“That’ll do.”

George knew conditions weren’t perfect, but the pay had been better than usual. Weapons or drugs, it had to be one of those in the containers, or both. Only drugs and guns brought in the big money. Someone would be unhappy about losing something, but that had nothing to do with him. The contents were sealed at the port and everyone knew it was impossible to transfer containers in the open ocean. The Volos had the cranes to do it though and the right equipment. George risked getting wet to yell at the men on the deck.

“Alright, get it done.” He yelled. “Bring over the empties first, then send them the full ones. You know the routine guys.....Get it done.”

There was space for the empty containers, just. It was going to be awkward, especially as the rain was getting worse. They’d do it though, his crew always got it done. Someone somewhere was going to be pissed off though, when the empty containers were opened.

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Penny Green thought things would be quieter and a little more relaxed, now that George had returned to Paris. Love of course, which didn’t seem to get any less intense with the passing years. Malou had been missing George and George had been missing Malou, simple as that. It meant she had her corner office to herself, a day or so earlier than expected. She did wonder if expecting a quiet day had been a little premature, when the reception desk called her.

“Ronald Kelly is here, he’s not in the diary.”

“That’s alright, send him up.”

A diary had never worked before and was unlikely to work now, but Penny felt a need to at least try to bring a little more organisation to the Polandrous Foundation. She waved Ronald in, as he tapped on the glass door.

“Come in Ronald, I’m hoping you have news about the death of Razors.”

He sat down, putting a black leather briefcase on his lap. To Penny it screamed government department, though that might have been her over active imagination.

“Before I show you something, I have to mention George.” Said Ronald.

“Oh dear, what has he done now ?”

“I’m sure you’re aware that he hired a private investigator to look for whoever Razors was working for.” Said Ronald.

“Yes, I did know he was considering it. Yes, I should have told you, but George might sometimes go a little too far, but he is always my boss.”

“I get it Penny, in the hierarchy of loyalty, the boss always come first.” Said Ronald. “No real harm done; we’ve taken care of the investigator.”

“Oh, was he hurt ?”

“No, nothing like that. We gave him what we call the land of hope and glory speech. His patriotism was called on, his loyalty to crown and country. He went away looking like a new man, one who no longer works for George. I bet he tells his mates he received a pat on the back from MI5, or something like that. Not that any of them will believe him.”

“Oh, Ronald.....That’s outrageous.”

She had to laugh, but at least the investigator hadn’t been hurt, or threatened.

“Well, you’ve given me something to chuckle about.” Said Penny. “You need to tell George though, or he’ll just hire someone else.”

“Yes, but I’m leaving that phone call to Foxy.”

“A good idea.....Coffee ? I think there are biscuits too. Garibaldi’s I think, there are some left now George isn’t here to eat them all.”

“Coffee and biscuits sounds wonderful.” Said Ronald.

He kept the briefcase on his lap until the person delivering their coffee had been and gone. It was if he didn’t want anyone except her, to see what it contained. When they were nibbling at the garibaldi’s, Ronald took a picture out of his briefcase.

“Think carefully, Penny. Have you ever met this man ?”

It could have been any middle-aged man with a bit of a tummy and thinning hair. There really were no distinguishing features to make him memorable. Her father had known a friend with the world’s worst wig. Penny would remember that wig until the day she died. There was nothing about the man in the picture to know him by, nothing at all.

“No, I’m sorry Ronald.....”

Or maybe there was something, a memory from not that long ago. She’d only seen him once, Dianna had seen more of him than her, she’d shown him around the entire building.

“Maybe.....Now I look again. I’ll need to show this to Dianna, if that’s alright ?”

“Yes, of course.”

Penny could sense Dianna was having a bad morning, by how keen she was to get a few minutes away from the phones. She was stood in her office a couple of minutes after the call.

“Do you recognise this man ?” Asked Penny. “He looks like the man who quoted for daytime security staff, but you saw more of him than I did.”

“Yes, Peter was his name, Peter Goulde.” Said Dianna. “I remember him saying the e on the end of Gould was because his name had Anglo-Saxon roots. He asked a lot of questions, but I suppose he needed to....For the quote.”

“Thank you, I remember him now.” Said Penny.

As Dianna left, Penny went through the third drawer in her desk, the one at the bottom. Live names were on one list, but she rarely threw anything like that out. There he was, Peter Goulde. Owner and managing director of Shield Personal Security, the trading name of what sounded like an off the shelf company. Name, address and phone numbers, all used by her at one time or another. She handed the single sheet of A4 paper to Ronald.

“This is him; I remember him now.” She said. “Expensive quote, but we still might have used him. In the end we went with the people George knew.”

“How did you hear about Shield ?” Asked Ronald. “Was it a recommendation ?”

“I looked online for someone in this area.....I suppose that wasn’t very clever.”

“No, everyone finds services online these days. I can tell you Mr Goulde with an e runs a successful group of companies. Everything from executive cars and security guards, to contract cleaning. He’s

also the man we're sure Razors was reporting to. It's just another link in what is probably a long chain. We'll start watching Peter and his senior staff, until they lead us to someone further along the chain."

"Do you ever give up?" Penny Asked.

"No, but we can run out of our budget. At the moment Foxy has managed to get almost a blank cheque. The longer things take though.....But we'll do our best."

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Sophie had trusted her and Sophie was a good friend. Cal only thought about that after she'd run out of the rear entrance to a clothing store. For all she knew Sophie might get into trouble. They'd definitely start searching for her. Guilt began to build as she thought of the inevitable conversation with Ruby. Abe too, he was bound to tell her how disappointed he was at her behaviour. It all made her run, faster and faster. By the time she reached Baku Zoological Gardens, Cal was so out of breath, that she could barely speak. Going to the zoo wasn't an accident. There'd be crowds there to hide in and she really did want to see the animals.

"Are you alright? Is someone chasing you?"

A woman, with a concerned looking man stood next to her. A young child was stood near the woman and his look was more curious than concerned. The woman had spoken in Arabic, though her accent was something Cal had never heard before. Baku was a melting pot, as Ruby had told her at the hotel.

"I had a fight with my sister." Said Cal. "She always treats me like a child."

It was a little of the truth and she did think of Sophie as being a bit like a sister. An angry sister probably, who was certain to be using all sorts of special gifts to look for her. In an attempt to get a little freedom, things were likely to get worse. She hadn't wanted to, but Cal cried, just a little. The unknown woman hugged her, while her son watched with even more curiosity.

"Where are you staying?" Asked the man.

"The Baku Marriott.....I just needed a little space from my sister."

"She could come with us." Said the woman.

"Her parents must be worried about her." Said the man.

The boy holding Cal's hand seemed to make up his mother's mind.

"You could come to the zoo with us, if you want?"

Cal did want and the man saying they'd take her to the Marriott afterwards, didn't worry her. If she could lose Sophie, getting away from a family of tourists would be a piece of cake. She had no idea what the expression meant, but Charlotte used it to say something was really easy.

"Yes, I wanted to see the animals." Said Cal.

The zoo was fun and the family weren't tourists. The husband worked for a large bank and had been seconded to Baku for two years. The accent was from the UAE, where they'd lived for a number of years. She'd learned their names and knew that their son was called Yousef. After the zoo they'd had ice cream in a small café.

When the husband had talked about taking her to the hotel, Cal had said she needed to use the bathroom. After that it had been easy to simply vanish among the shoppers and sightseers. No running this time, she'd walked away. Hungry, she hadn't eaten since breakfast, apart from ice cream and a coffee.

"Oh yes, Sarah's always saying how good they are." She muttered.

Cal had a little money; she'd been intending to get a meal somewhere. The Domino's Pizza place seemed to call out to her, especially as Sarah seemed addicted to their food. A nice wide street and

a brightly lit building. Not the sort of seedy places Sophie had warned her about. She'd never been in a pizza place before. Cal had only eaten pizza two or three times in her entire life, but she remembered enjoying it. She looked at the prices on the wall and knew she could afford a treat and still pay for a taxi to the hotel. She was nervous as she walked inside, until the wonderful smell hit her senses and made her realise how hungry she was.

'We don't close until 2am.' Said a sign on the wall.

It was all so amazing and they came to her table to see what she wanted. All the time she ate, she could see two boys looking at her. Not as old as her brother, but older than her. Then again, she sometimes thought everyone was older than her. One had smiled, so she'd smiled back. They were nice, she could tell. After a few smiles and asking if they could, they were sat at her table.

"I'm Murad and my friend is Samir.....Don't talk to him though, he always lies to girls."

"No, I never do that."

She liked them and loved the idea of them both trying to get her attention. When they'd offered to drive her back to the Marriott, it had been so easy to say yes.

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Ruby wasn't pleased with being interrupted in a meeting with some of Sanjar's contacts, mostly local businessmen. The sort of businessmen who could arrange to acquire a few things she needed and a safe place for a few of her people to wait out the coming storm. Monique was high on the list of those she wanted to leave in Baku. Max's wife had taken a beating when the compound had been invaded. Her bravery was beyond reproach, but she was one of life's civilians and always would be. Max had already volunteered for the job of telling her.

"We've lost.....I lost Cal, she vanished while trying on a dress." Said Sophie.

"Kallina can find anyone, anywhere." Said Ruby. "Why isn't she out there looking for the girl?"

It was getting dark outside. It seemed they'd all agreed to leave Cal to enjoy her quiet time on her own. The plan was to begin looking for her if she wasn't at the hotel by dusk. It was now well beyond dusk.

"Kallina traced her, in her own unique way." Said Charlie. "She felt her presence at the zoo and went to get her."

"That was hours ago and we haven't heard from Kallina since then." Added Sophie. "Nari looked around the zoo, but they're not there....Either of them."

"Did anyone think of giving Kallina a local cell phone?" Asked Ruby.

"It was all so quick and.....Well, it was Kallina." Said Sarah. "Nothing hurts Baba Yaga."

Ruby was getting angry; she could feel her cheeks getting hot.

"Spider.....Did you at least get the car I asked you to buy?" She asked.

"Yes, completely legal, but untraceable if we ever need to abandon it. A cousin of Sanjar's aunt or something like that, found the car for me. A big old Citroen that'll seat six in comfort."

Good old Spider, he never let her down, or lost his focus. That was one of the reasons she always took him with her as part of the team. It was his military training of course, he just got on with things.

"Great, some good news." Said Ruby. "Where is Todd? Please don't tell me he's wandering around Baku without a phone."

"Nari met a couple who'd helped a girl at the zoo." Said Sophie. "Her Arabic isn't that good, so Todd went to talk to them.....He does have a phone."

So many people crammed into her hotel room, some having their own private conversations. It wouldn't do, it wouldn't do at all.

“Sarah.....Call Todd and get him back here.” Ruby yelled.

“I’m going out to find Cal and there will be only one search party.” She added. “No individuals getting lost and annoying the locals. Definitely no weapons in the hotel. I will take four with me and one needs to be Luca..... Where is Luca ?”

“Over here, sat next to the bed.”

“Good....Bring the sort of medical kit you’d normally take for a trauma call.” Said Ruby. “Assume the worst and bring anything you need to handle it. Spider will be driving me.....I want a truthful answer, Spider. This isn’t a trick question, there is no wrong answer. Are there weapons in the trunk of our newly acquired car ?”

“Yes, there are.”

“Enough ?”

“Yes.”

“Good.... Then I need two big hitters, so Sophie and Charlotte will be coming with me. Those staying here; listen to Todd when he gets back. He and Nari will be in charge of things here in the Marriott.”

“You can’t leave me behind.” Said Sarah, who was still on the phone. “I’m your good luck charm, remember ?”

“Alright, but you’ll need to squeeze in a bit when we find Cal.” Said Ruby. “If she needs to lie down, you’ll need to get a taxi back.....Agreed ?”

“Fine.” Said Sarah. “Todd is at the Domino’s. The family saw Cal in there when they were walking home. She was with two local men.”

Damn....If it turned out everyone was getting in a panic because Cal had hooked up with a local boy, Ruby would leave her behind in Baku. She’d already been thinking of doing that.

“I know where the Domino’s is.” Said Sarah.

“I guessed you might.” Said Ruby. “It’s as good a place to start searching as any. Tell Todd I still want him back here to organise any information that comes in.”

If Cal had been in the pizza place, she was still in the city. That mattered, it meant Gallaan hadn’t found them and taken the girl out of the country. If Cal was still in Baku, she’d be able to find her.

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