

Ruby 3

Chapter 4 – Great Rift Valley

“Street fights were often like that, barely organised chaos. The important thing was who was still standing and who was in the hospital by morning.”

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“Gitaru looks bigger than it did on the map.” Said Anna.

“Places always do.” Said Ruby.

It was still a long way from dusk; it was going to be an early end to their day. Kallina said nothing, as she watched the brake lights as Doc did a hard turn to their right. She’d visited most countries in the world at one time or another, even ones where towns on maps sometimes didn’t really exist at all. Gitaru looked wonderfully green, with mature trees along the side of the road. A pleasant looking town that could have been anywhere in the world, if hadn’t been for street signs and notices in both English and Swahili.

“Anyone know the names of the people we’re staying with ?” Asked Sarah.

“It’s just for tonight.” Said Ruby. “The man is Ben and his wife is Muthoni. Doc mentioned they had a few kids, but I don’t know their names. There’s also a sister living there, Muthoni’s I think.”

The road did a sharp turn to the left and they drove past a church, about the fourth since they’d entered the town. About fifty yards down a small street, Doc turned right off the road and parked next to tidy looking single storey building.

“Do I follow him ?” Asked Anna. “There isn’t really room to park on the street.”

“He’s waving you in.....Park next to him and leave room for Monique.” Said Ruby.

Once past a few bushes, there was quite a bit of space in the yard, easily enough for their three vehicles. A young boy came out and pulled a gate closed behind them. How a place felt was important to Kallina and the house they were to stay at felt good, a safe place for them to stay the night. Something felt strange though, something they’d probably brought with them.

“Might be nothing Ruby, or maybe.....Get Nari to look over the vehicle Monique was driving.”

“Thank you, I will.”

People came out of the house to greet them as everyone piled out of the vehicles. The entire family came out, even a toddler cuddling a stuffed toy Garfield. It was a daft thing to do, no one would remember anyone’s name, especially as they were leaving the next morning. Daft or not, everyone introduced themselves to everyone else, sometimes more than once to the same person. There were details about the family too. It appeared the toddler had to be watched or he tried to chew rocks.

“Come into the house.” Said Ben. “You’ll need your sleeping bags, but we’ve cleared space for you. The children have all been moved into one room and the floor of my study is quite large.”

Muthoni sounded local, though Ben had picked up a slight American accent somewhere. They were nice people, Kallina felt she needed to reciprocate the niceness. She picked up the toddler, holding him in her arms.

“Stop trying to eat rocks.” She told him. “They’re not good for you.”

She kissed him on the forehead and even though he probably didn’t understand English, she was sure he’d understood the idea. Only Ruby giving her a dopey look spoiled the moment.

“Dinner won’t be long, I hope you’re all hungry.” Shouted Muthoni.

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Lily was twenty four and had already handed her resignation in once. She'd decided her future hadn't been with a clandestine part of the British security services, who operated out of a car breakers yard near Rochester. Besides, the pay was fairly crap considering the hours she often had to work. The breakers yard had to look genuine, they really did crush a few old cars. Finding a thin film of grease on her beloved Mini had been the final straw.

"I can understand Lily, I really can." Foxy had told her. "There is English Heritage, I know someone there. I could even arrange for you to spend a little time there, feeling things out as it were. I know The National Register of Archives are always looking for good people. A nice steady department with regular reviews and promotions. Would you like me to talk to them?"

That was how he'd done it. Not by talking her into staying, but by painting other options as being extremely tedious and mind bogglingly dull. She'd been manipulated, she'd known that. There had been a promotion though, one that paid a little more money. The intercom on her desk chirruped at her. She liked Foxy and hadn't really wanted to leave. Even his occasional phone call over a flap at three in the morning was tolerable. Besides, he turned a blind eye to her tattoos, especial the one of a dragon that sometimes peeped over the top of her blouse.

"Is Trudy here yet?" Asked Foxy.

"Yes, she's been waiting for a while. I gave her coffee and a plate of biscuits."

"Bring her in, I want you here for this one. Lots of notes."

Lily had learned shorthand when everyone else thought it was a waste of time. She'd attended courses with people who tended to be journalists, or postgrad humanities students wanting tidier notebooks. Her shorthand became increasingly useful in a security service which was paranoid about recording devices.

"We can go in now Trudy." She said. "Bring your coffee if you want."

"I'd rather bring the biscuits."

Lily had liked Trudy fairly instantly. She'd had dealings with her before, but only as one of Ruby's thirteen super kids. Now they were all growing up, developing their own personalities and ways of dealing with the world. Trudy was young compared to the rest, born in Bermuda in nineteen fifty five, though she looked about twenty two. Very tall and very black, she'd found it hard to disguise herself for the trip home through China. Lily carried the biscuits, while Trudy held her coffee.

"Good to see you.....I hope to make these things more formal." Said Foxy. "More regular too, even when Ruby returns. Always nice to have another contact in case of need."

To Lily it sounded as though her boss was asking for a next of kin, someone else to step in if anything happened to Ruby. If Trudy thought that she didn't show it, her smile looked genuine.

"Ruby told me to help in any way I can, while she's away." Said Trudy. "As for after that.....I know Ruby can sometimes get tired of government bureaucracy, she might enjoy a break."

Wham..... Foxy had put his chin out and Trudy had punched it. Her boss hadn't expected a reply like that, she could see it in his eyes. It looked as though Ruby's wunderkinds really were growing old and wiser.

"So, why did you want to see me?" Asked Trudy.

"Would you mind if Lily took notes?" Asked Foxy.

"No, not at all."

"Not every piece of information we receive comes from a source Her Majesty's security services would like to become public." Said Foxy. "Actually I'd go as far as saying, most of our intelligence comes from the dark underbelly of foreign and domestic politics. The source who gave us the

information about the attack in Nairobi was just such a contact. Reliable, but not someone whose name can never be divulged.”

“No problem, Ruby won’t care about that.” Said Trudy.

Her Boss was looking awkward, a rare event. He’d once been summoned to a meeting by several back bench MPs. They’d attempted to give him a hard time, the political equivalent of being roasted slowly over an open fire. Foxy had come out of it all looking refreshed, while one of the MPs had needed to take an unplanned vacation.

“It’s just that my informant thinks the Russians in Kenya were only hired mercenaries. In fact none of my contacts have a clue who suddenly wants Ruby dead and neither do I. There is general noise on the ground, muttering about someone with money hiring the best. It isn’t over, there are more assassins on their way. Do you have a way of contacting Ruby ?”

“You seem to think we all have a permanent mental link, but we don’t.” Said Trudy. “My way to contact her is to pick up the phone or send a text. Don’t you have a local guy in Kenya ?”

“I did have, a very reliable husband and wife team. They’re both now missing, our person at the British High Commission in Nairobi thinks they’re both likely to be dead. As I said, whoever is after Ruby has the money to hire the best. I suggest you ignore the usual rules about silent running and text Ruby right now.”

“Of course, I’ll send a copy to Sarah and Spider too.”

Lily was taking notes and the question formed in her mind and refused to go away.

“Why them ?” She asked.

They were both looking at her, as though she wasn’t supposed to have spoken.

“It’s important.” Said Lily. “In case we have something important they need to know.”

“She has a point.” Said Foxy.

“Sarah and Spider are closest to her, always have been.” Said Trudy. “Spider will react like a warrior and Sarah will fuss until everyone takes it seriously.”

It matched the psych evaluations in their files, though Lily wrote it in her notes anyway. Lily watched as Trudy tapped a fairly short text message into her phone and pressed send.

“It’s done.”

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Muthoni and her sister had cooked a wonderful meal. Paying Doc about four times over the odds for the trip probably had something to do with it, though Ben and Muthoni seemed genuinely friendly. The young man who’d closed the gate was called Chege, though that might have been just a nickname. He looked about fourteen and had arrived with the weapons Doc had promised Spider. His youth shocked Ruby, though Ben assured her the boy was a family friend and not just a delivery boy for a local arms trader.

“He’ll stay and help you load up the four wheel drives in the morning.” Ben had told her.

The sister still had no name, nor had the children. It felt as though their parents had decided to keep them well away from Doc and his seedy friends. The toddler was now following Kallina everywhere, she’d begun calling him Gunga Salla, shortened most of the time to just Gunga. Kallina claimed it meant eater of rocks in ancient Sumerian and Ruby wasn’t going to argue with her. Ruby picked up her glass, which contained a pretty good local wine.

“A toast, a toast.” She yelled. “To Ben, Muthoni and the mysterious sister. Thank you for this truly wonderful meal.”

A few of her precious super kids had probably enjoyed the wine a little too much, some of the repeated toasts sounded a bit slurred.

"To the mysterious sister." Shouted Spider.

It became almost a chant, going right round the group. Much to the poor girl's embarrassment, someone even started a rolling wave, the sort of thing usual reserved for football matches.

"The mysterious sister." They all shouted.

"Sorry." Said Ruby.

"Not a problem, glad you enjoyed the meal." Said Muthoni's sister.

Nari picked that moment to come into the lounge, carrying what looked like a grubby bundle of wires. She had popped in for food and a glass of wine, though she'd been absent for most of the evening. She dropped the bundle of wires on the floor next to Ruby. There was a small box connected to the wires. It looked to have been struck several times with a blunt heavy object.

"I found that and destroyed it soon after we arrived." Said Nari. "It was under the bonnet of the vehicle Monique was driving."

"I'm assuming it's a tracker of some kind." Said Ruby.

Doc became interested, picking up the oily wires and ruined metal box.

"It is and a sophisticate one." He said. "Wired into the vehicle's battery by the look of it."

"I checked that vehicle in your yard, it wasn't there then." Said Nari.

"What are you trying to imply?" Asked Doc.

Doc had probably only intended to prod Nari on the shoulder. She was someone who didn't appreciate being prodded though. Doc was quickly yelling, as Nari twisted his wrist through an almost impossible angle.

"Fuck..... Why would I plant a tracker?" He shouted. "I could just use my phone to tell someone where we are."

"He has a point, let him go Nari."

Ruby picked up the box with wires and twirled it around, learning nothing. It wasn't her sort of thing, but her group had wide and varied skills, it had to be someone's thing.

"A question for everyone, I don't care who answers, as long as they know what they're talking about. How bad is it? Will whoever planted this device know where we are?"

"Depends..... How long was it working for after we arrived here?" Asked Spider.

"Not long, two or three minutes." Said Nari.

"Then they'll probably have a general direction, maybe even Gitaru....But probably not an exact position. It doesn't mean they can't look over every yard gate in town of course." Said Spider.

"Crap." Said Sophie.

Nearly everyone had drunk a bit too much. Ruby didn't fancy loading up the vehicles at night anyway. Plus if you make too much noise in a residential area the cops had a nasty habit of turning up.

"We'll stay until morning, though we'll set a watch." Said Ruby. "I hate to order you out of your own home Muthoni, but if you trust a neighbour enough to take your children to them?"

Muthoni merely nodded at her, she obviously picked things up quickly.

"I'm staying." Said Ben. "I've got a shotgun in a cupboard in my den."

Ruby was still looking at his wife, as she pried a crying toddler away from Kallina.

"Muthoni, please invent a story that doesn't make us the talk of the street."

"I will Ruby.....Our friends aren't the sort to ask questions anyway."

Time to deal with Ben and his shotgun.

“Your shotgun might be useful Ben.” She said. “We will try to deal silently with any uninvited guests, my colleagues are experts at hand to hand combat, and a few other skills. A watch will be needed, do I have volunteers for first watch ?”

Nearly everyone put their hand up, including Ben. Ruby felt guilty enough already, for sending away his wife and children. If at all possible she’d give him at least the possibility of a decent night’s sleep. “If you see anything strange, wake everyone up.” Said Ruby. “Gunfire must be avoided and used only as a last resort. Alright, first watch will be Sarah, Anna and Sophie.”

“Oh, for.....” Muttered Sarah.

“No arguments, the enemy is out there, not in here.” Said Ruby. “Just get on with each other.....Or else.”

Spider came out to find her when she walking the outside fence, looking for weak spots. The worrying thing was that it was a family home, every section of the fence was a weak spot.

“I knew you’d give yourself first watch too.” He said. “And probably second and third.”

“It looks like the text warning from Trudy was right.” Said Ruby. “Of all the places to be attacked, this would be my last choice.”

He briefly held her hand, something he hadn’t done for a while.

“I never did say how grateful I was..... For being rescued from that hospital in Tallinn, even if my ribs still ache a bit.”

She wanted to hug him, but she had to be hard, had to be tough. She could almost hear Kurt telling her to be tougher than she thought she could be. People were probably going to die if the assassins following her turned up. There could be no space in her for the warmth of normal human emotions.

“Just don’t start popping off that gun of yours.” She said.

“About that.....I could use a couple of things we took off the Russians at the hotel.”

“Sophie has everything in her bags.....Tell her I said you can take what you need.”

“Brilliant.”

Ruby had to let a crack open a little in her armour, it was Spider after all. She kissed his cheek, feeling his skin blush in the darkness.

“Just don’t get yourself killed Rupert, I need you.”

“Then I will do my best not to die princess.”

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Olga had a reputation in certain parts of Budapest, a reputation for being fierce, someone definitely not to be pissed off. Recently celebrating her thirty fifth birthday hadn’t improved her general mood, if anything it had made her constant scowl a little harsher.

“Definitely someone following us, been with us since leaving Kemencés Pizza place.” Said Igor.

Who would follow her and two of her guys ? At over six feet tall with long blonde hair, not to mention her well known attitude, people tended to avoid her. They avoided her when she went out alone. Still, Igor had been with her a long time, she trusted his judgement.

“Two of them at least.” Added Aron.

Aron was local, and ex-gang member from one of the right wing gangs. Not her first choice, but finding experienced people was becoming harder all the time. Aron had several facial tattoos that made him intimidating to some. Useful if she needed information from someone reluctant to talk, but a real nuisance when it came to the police. Aron being with her made her more visible than if she was standing under a spotlight. Olga knew the streets of Budapest well, she thought about the best place to find out who had the nerve to follow her.

“We’ll take them in the carpark of the SPAR supermarket.” She said. “You must remember it Igor, we taught Latvian George a lesson there once.”

“I remember, I’m told George still walks with a limp.”

It wasn’t that far, she could have done with more time to remember the layout of the car park behind the Spar. There had been several rows of bins when they’d taught George a little respect, and a parked up delivery van. Things changed though and it had been a few years back.

“Same as last time.” She said. “Walk through the car park slowly, as though we’re using it as a short cut. There must be somewhere we can hide, they must still have rubbish bins.”

“They do, my sister uses the place.” Said Aron. “They get junkies there in the summer, but not on a cold night like this.”

“Good.” Said Olga.

It was a crap plan really but it had been a crap plan then too. Street fights were often like that, barely organised chaos. The important thing was who was still standing and who was in the hospital by morning. There had been a light dusting of snow the previous night, which was good and bad. It muffled the footsteps of those following them. It would also help quieten any sounds of fighting.

“There.....Hang back a little Igor and hide behind the van.”

It was the same van as last time, she was sure of it. It didn’t look to have moved in a while. It might well have been an abandoned wreck, but they didn’t stop it being a useful place for Igor to hide. She trusted him, no looking over her shoulder to make sure Igor was well hidden.

“Fucking snow.” Said Aron. “I hear three of them, I think..... So difficult to hear.”

“They’re close now, I hear three.... Slow down a bit more.” She said.

Rows of multi-coloured bins seemed a constant behind any supermarket anywhere in the world.

They all had an unpleasant odour, though the stink from the yellow bin was the worst.

“Here.” She said.

Olga crouched behind the yellow bin, hoping the stink would put off whoever was following them. Aron crouched next to her, while removing a wicked looking knife from under his jacket. That’s how street fights were, reasonably quiet, fought out with blades instead of guns. Gunfire brought trouble, it usually meant the arrival of heavily armed cops. Olga had her own blade and a third of a roll of duct tape. Duct tape was easy to explain if you were carrying it, everyone used duct tape. It not only fixed things around the house, it was better than handcuffs and was better at keeping people quiet than a ball-gag. It also made a good way to hold on a wound dressing, though pulling it off could be agony. Aron touched her arm and pointed to their right.

Olga had heard it too, the sound of two people crunching over the fresh snow. The snow had swapped sides and now told her exactly where the enemy was. Only two though, the third person had probably gone round to the other exit. They were trying to ambush them too, Olga was impressed. These weren’t some gang of mindless street thugs. She leant towards Aron, whispering in his ear.

“Careful, I think these ones are good....Use the gun if you have to.”

He nodded and Olga risked a quick look at the back entrance to the car park. He was there, or she was, the figure dressed in a suit looked a little short for a man. The suit was strange too; it had to be minus five on the streets of Budapest. Olga saw the person of undetermined gender lean back a little as they barked like a fox. Wow, that was new, though it made a change from owl hoots as a signal.

Their adversaries were in place, the fun was about to begin.

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Spider had never fallen asleep while on watch, never, ever. There comes a moment though that every soldier knows, when they're awake and ready for action, yet most of their mind is running on autopilot. Spider actually jumped as Kallina suddenly appeared next to him. Not even some distance away, really close, close enough to smell she was wearing perfume.

"There are six of them this time, they mean business." She said.

"How far away?"

"Half a mile, but they know where we are. They were waiting for their friends to show up. They will want to attack us soon to get their business finished while it's still dark."

Spider looked at the trees beyond the fence and realised he hadn't seen a thing. They must have carried out reconnaissance on the house and he hadn't seen or heard a damn thing. Ruby arrived next, though at least she arrived walking, rather than appearing out of thin air.

"I felt six arrive." She said.

"Yes six, a mixed group of mercenaries I think. I heard Poles, Russians, even a guy speaking Swedish." Said Kallina. "The sort of soldiers for rent Max used to hire."

"Crap, do you think Max is behind this?" Asked Spider.

"No, if there's one thing I'm certain of." Said Ruby. "Max Krause is no longer hunting us."

"Then who?"

"I have no idea yet." Said Ruby. "We'll have to make sure one of them lives long enough to be interrogated."

"I could take care of it right now." Said Kallina. "I've walked unseen among them, to kill them would be just as easy. Let me make this problem go away Ruby."

They were actually grinning at each other, he could just about see them in the light from the house.

"Ahh, but you'd go as Baba Yaga." Said Ruby. "You have been known to over react a little."

"Only a little." Said Kallina.

"The inhabitants of what remains of the area around the East Sea Fleet Base in North Korea, might disagree with that." Said Ruby. "I think we owe it to the people of Gitaru to try and leave at least some of their homes in one piece."

"Call if you need me." Said Kallina, before vanishing.

"I love Kallina, but she's a sledge hammer." Said Ruby. "What this situation needs is a small tapping hammer, something just big enough to get the job done. Get inside Spider, we'll lure them right inside the house.... Then we'll kill them."

"If they're good, luring them won't be easy." Said Spider.

"I'm sure we can confuse them. Charlotte and I are good at that, confusing people."

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Definitely a woman, Olga felt the hint of a breast as she grabbed her. Olga wasn't big in the dreadful modern meaning of that word. She was tall and muscular, but there wasn't an ounce of fat on her. Her instructor in an army of a country she refused to name to anyone, had told her to use her strength and the weight that came from being over six feet tall. She got a good firm hold, spinning the woman round, throwing her against the rear wall of the Spar.

"Ohhhh."

Pain, the woman made the noise of real pain as she struck the wall, hard. Small but wiry and strong, her partner in the dance came back at her, blade held up, ready to strike.

"Who the hell are you?" Asked Olga. "You're not from a local gang."

No answer of course, Olga hadn't expected one. She had no idea how Igor and Aron were doing, that was how it was in a street fight. Wicked looking blades wielded by experts, it was the closest thing to

you'd find to medieval warfare in the twenty first century. If her men died, she'd do her best to avenge them. Her opponent's blade went past her eyes, cutting an inch off her long blonde hair. "My hair..... For that you'll die."

Easier said than done, her opponent was fast on her feet. Being petite had its advantages, the woman was faster than her and she could change direction quicker. Another slicing blow came far too close to Olga's throat.

"Ohhhh."

Another yelp of pain as Olga ran her blade over her opponents left elbow. The expensive looking suit had probably cost someone more than most inhabitants of Budapest earned in a year, but it was useless as armour.

"Leather, you should have at least worn leather." Said Olga.

Olga kicked her opponent, it was amazing how often that caught people by surprise. It was as if they didn't expect it, especially from a woman. She kicked out and kept pushing, slamming the woman into the wall of the SPAR supermarket again. No time for banter or battle etiquette anymore, Olga grabbed her wrist, slamming it into the wall. The woman still hadn't dropped the knife, but that didn't matter.

"Tell me who sent you and I won't kill you."

"ебать тебя."

Olga had been born in Russia, she knew fuck you when she heard it in the language of her own country. She drove her blade into the woman's throat. Her opponent was fatally wounded, but no one with that much skill could be left alive. Olga drove her blade through the expensive suit and the silk blouse underneath. Up under the ribs her blade went, right up into the heart. She twisted the knife and kept on twisting until she was certain the woman was dead. It was an effective way of killing someone, though it was messy. Olga knew she'd look as though she'd spent the day working in a slaughterhouse.

"No Aron..... We need one alive." She yelled.

Igor's man was on the ground and not moving and Igor was moving to help Aron. Olga tried to run, but the after effects of adrenalin were making her feel sluggish. It always happened when her body no longer had need of the fight or flight hormone. Like a junkie on the come down, her body wanted her to rest, maybe even sleep it off.

"Try telling him that." Shouted Aron.

Aron was limping; his left leg must have been injured. His opponent had blood on his face and neck, though he was still fighting. He was waving a blade that had to be a foot and a half long, more of a short sword than a knife. Olga took a chance, a real gamble with her life if it went wrong.

"Hey fucker, want to dance with me ?" She shouted.

She ran at the man waving her blood soaked blade right at him. She must have looked like something from hell itself, she certainly had his attention. Igor came up behind the man, hitting him over the head with something. Olga allowed herself to relax when she felt for a pulse and found one. He was a big bull of a man, obviously a fractured skull wasn't going to send him to the afterlife.

"Get him bound and gagged Igor, I'll help Aron..... What did you hit him with ?"

Igor held up what looked like a third of a concrete paving slab, before shrugging and dropping it.

Aron had a nasty wound just above his left knee, which was bleeding quite badly. She used most of the dead woman's blouse to pack the wound, before wrapping everything in layers of duct tape.

Aron didn't yell once, which impressed her.

"You'll live." She told him.

"We need a car Igor. Make sure you walk at least two blocks before stealing one."

"I know, done it before."

"Sorry, been one of those nights." She said.

"Tell me about it." Said Igor.

His eyes were open, their prisoner. The man had a few wounds, though she wasn't going to do anything about them. He was unlikely to die until she wanted him to, after he'd told her who he was working for. She prodded him with the sharp and bloody end of her blade.

"Soon you and I are going to have a long talk." She said.

His eyes held a little fear. Good, she could work with that. As for his friends? After going through their pockets and relieving them of anything useful, they'd be left where they were. Someone was bound to find them, eventually.

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At one time Sarah Simmons would have made herself small if a fight looked likely. She'd have hidden, leaving others to deal with the trouble. After Baku things had been different, the fight in a building site to the north of the city had changed her. That and a natural ability to fire a gun and hit what she aimed at. No gun this time, Sarah bounced a meat tenderising mallet up and down on her palm. A weapon she'd liberated from the kitchen.

"If you're in a strange house and need a weapon, look in the kitchen." Spider had once told her.

"You'd be amazed how much lethality there is in the average kitchen, all legally owned."

The mallet had a heavy stainless steel set of spikes to do the tenderising, attached to a solid hardwood handle. Sarah wasn't looking forward to using it on anyone, but she knew she could if she had to.

"You know what's going to happen; the people about to arrive won't even see you." Said Charlotte.

"Keep still and don't be squeamish about attacking them. They definitely wouldn't think twice about killing you."

"If you're injured." Said Spider. "Get on the ground and keep still until it's all over."

The 'if you're injured' worried her, though she was glad Spider was being honest.

"We're turning off all the lights, apart from a couple of nightlights." Said Charlotte. "Don't worry; your eyes will quickly adjust."

"She treats us like kids." Muttered Isobel.

Ruby was up on the roof, watching for their enemies to arrive. Sarah had faith in Ruby, the way some people have faith in their guardian angel. It would have been nice to have her in the room, but she was surrounded by a lot of the thirteen.

"Lights going off now." Said Spider.

"They seem to think we're five year olds." Muttered Isobel.

Isobel liked to moan, she was famous for it. No one took any notice and it was comforting in a weird kind of way. After a few seconds Sarah's eyes adjusted to the light and she could just about see Sophie on her right. Tempting to say something, but everyone was being silent, even Isobel. She never even heard Ben crawl up beside her.

"I'm going with the flow a bit." He whispered. "I will have lots of questions when it's all over though. Can Ruby really do it?"

"Yes, she can."

"Hey, you got the meat mallet."

"Rules of pillage, I saw it first. Now we need to be quiet."

She'd heard the large yard gates bang against the stop as someone opened them. The young man Chege was outside somewhere, he'd decided to do his own thing. As he wasn't actually related to anyone in the house, he'd become difficult to control. He seemed a bright kid though, Sarah doubted if he'd kicked the gate open.

"Oh.... Shit." Muttered Ben.

She grabbed his arm.

"Quiet." She muttered. "Or you might ruin the plan."

A body being thrown through the window was a shocking thing, she couldn't blame Ben for being upset. All of Ruby's people had seen the results of violence before, they'd all witnessed far too much death. The body on the lounge floor was Chege and someone had obviously given him a beating before killing him. Even with just the dim nightlights, Sarah could see the blood on the dead boy's face, the broken fingers, the arms bent sideways at impossible angles. Chege hadn't known their plan; he'd had nothing to tell the mercenaries.

"Charlotte and I will create an illusion in the minds of the soldiers." Ruby had told them. "They will only see Ben, Muthoni and their children sleeping on the floor. That will confuse them, I doubt if they'll know what to do. When Spider thinks the time is right, he will give the order to attack the mercenaries."

A simple plan and Sarah had faith in Ruby and Charlotte to create such an illusion. Only noise and bright light might spoil things and she doubted if the soldiers would want those either.

The soldiers came into the room next, one had to step over Chege's body. Silencers, they carried rifles fitted with long silencers. They looked confused to see a family lying asleep in bed rolls, seemingly oblivious to the ruined body on their floor. Easy to spot the leader, the one all the mercs were looking at.

"Hey, wake up ! Tell us where she is, the woman from London. Tell us or your children will get the same treatment as this boy."

Confusion and noise started as soon as Spider hit the man who'd spoken. Sarah wasn't sure what Spider had hit him with, but the man went down, crumpling to the floor.

"Now !" Yelled Spider.

Sarah knew battles were confusing and never went to plan, it was one of those unwritten laws of the universe. Serge had taught her a little about tactics, she'd even done pretty well in the training room in his basement. She spotted a soldier in a face mask and moved towards them. She wasn't going to let herself get distracted, not even by the soldier screaming as he flew across the room and collided with the stone fireplace. The thirteen were like that, the ways they fought were....a little unorthodox. Sarah reached the soldier, who seemed glued to the spot by fear or confusion.

"Hey you." Shouted Sarah. "This is for Chege."

Only the eyes were visible and only just. Sarah used all her strength to hit the merc just above the eyes. There was a flash of red as blood came out of a terrible wound. Sarah was grateful for the darkness as her opponent fell to the ground.

"Them or us, them or us." She muttered.

Fighting in a room with just Ruby had been bad enough, but the wunderkinds all had their own way of fighting. One of the soldiers was actually pressed against the ceiling, his neck twisted so his head was facing the wrong way. She was on their side, but Sarah still jumped when she came face to face with Imran.

"Keep you heard down Sarah." He yelled at her.

It was chaos, she was still spinning about and holding the bloody meat mallet, when Ruby turned on the lights. Ben was sitting on the floor, poor Chege's head on his lap. Ruby was looking around and obviously wasn't happy.

"Fuck..... I said take one of them alive. Now we still don't know who sent them." She yelled.

"We'll go through their equipment and vehicles." Said Spider. "They're bound to have left a few clues."

Sarah didn't realise she was crying, until Sophie was hugging her.

"Hey you did well Sarah. I saw you get that guy..... He was a big one."

~ ~

Doc was surprised he was still driving the lead vehicle as they covered the last few miles to The Great Rift Valley. He'd kept well out of the fighting, but he had seen the aftermath. Witchcraft was still a way of life in Kenya, he was a believer. If Ruby and her group could do that to the heavily armed mercenaries, he didn't want to upset them.

"They look so ordinary, like Mormons." He'd told Anna. "You'd expect them to ask if you've found Christ, not tear people apart without touching them."

He liked Anna and he was sure she liked him, she'd given him 'the look' a few times. If there hadn't been a fight at Ben's house, they'd probably have slept together. Plus she was like him as far as he knew, a confused person with no special gifts.

"Wow, that is quite a view." Said Sarah.

"It gets even better..... We've another five miles or so before we get to The Great Rift Valley View Point, it's just past Limuru." Said Doc.

The main reason Doc hadn't run for home that morning was compensation and the way Ruby had thrown it about so easily. It wasn't just the amounts, she'd known the etiquette, she'd obviously bought her way out of problems before.

"Chege's gang will need to take care of his funeral and compensate his family." She'd told Ben.

Not that Ben had argued. Actually he had for a while, until Ruby had offered him enough to buy a new house, somewhere nicer than Gitaru.

"Sorry, you can't go home." She'd told him.

The arrogance of the girl. It was how the British had treated most of Africa. Oh we're sorry we fucked up your country, but here's some compensation. The annoying thing was that it worked. Ben was grinning from ear to ear by the time they left, talking about moving to the coast, somewhere near Mombasa.

"Collect your children's thing quickly, today." Ruby had ordered Ben. "The men we killed have friends and they will come looking for them. I can arrange for someone in London to get the money to you. Buy a new house, a better house."

The amount of money talked about was staggering to him. Yes, if Ruby had that kind of cash to throw about, he was going to stick with her and her strange friends. Doc hoped some of her money might end up coming his way.

"Stop..... Please stop Doc." Said Isobel. "The view.....We have to look at it properly."

"It gets better further down the road." He said.

"I don't care, please stop....Even if it's only for a minute."

There was just enough room for all three vehicles to safely park on the side of the road. The view was breath taking and even he wasn't immune to the grandeur of the Great Rift. Ruby joined him, as everyone looked at one of the greatest views on the planet and probably the birth place of intelligent human life. Doc couldn't help switching into tour guide mode.

“The Rift Valley was formed by violent subterranean forces that tore apart the earth's crust. These forces caused huge chunks of the crust to sink between parallel fault lines and force up molten rock in volcanic eruptions.”

“It’s beautiful.” Said Sophie.

“It is and there is so much of it, covering so many square miles.” Said Ruby. “And yet I have no idea where I’m supposed to go, or do when I get there. I don’t even know who the hell is trying to kill me.”

“Sounds normal for us.” Said Spider.

“It’s all so……Wonderful.” Said Sarah.

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