

Ruby

Chapter 10 - Amasra

“Everything I’m looking up tells you to stay away from east of the Caspian, George. Only a fool or a mad person would go there.”

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Olga was the real expert on weapons, she instructed Serge and Spider as they lifted the heavy machine gun into position.

“I can see why they’re called heavy machine guns.” Said Spider.

Olga was running her hand over the weapon, almost as though stroking a pet.

“No radar aiming, nothing high tech, just point and fire. Perfect, very little to go wrong and it’ll still be working fifty years from now.” She said.

They’d already fitted the rear machine gun, so there was a lot less getting in each other’s way and a bit less swearing. Olga swung the twin barrelled weapon around on its mount and it moved smoothly and easily.

“She’s been well cared for.” She said.

Spider exchanged a look with Ruby and they both laughed.

“Arseholes.” Said Olga with a smile.

Ruby helped Olga load the ammo, they both knew that doing it right was important, if you wanted to avoid the weapon jamming up. It had been a while, but Ruby had loaded similar weapons while working with Jurgis. Olga began to put the tarpaulin cover over the machine gun.

“We should test them.” Said Spider.

“These are busy waters, someone might hear.” Said Olga.

Spider waved his arm in a wide circle; there was nothing in any direction apart from gentle waves.

“Who ? We’ve seen no other vessel since we left Dyuni.”

Ruby remembered why Jurgis called Olga his Valkyrie. A wild look came into her eyes and she grabbed the handles to swing the heavy weapon around.

“Ok,” she said, “but this one is mine. One short burst Spider, we might need the ammunition.”

Olga aimed the weapon out to sea and fired, seeming to aim at the white top of a wave about fifty yards away. Then Spider’s weapon added to the noise which was almost deafening. Even Ruby felt her heart race as adrenalin flooded her system. There was always a certain something about the roar of heavy weapon fire. As the guns fell silent, Sarah appeared. She was looking unhappy and was dressed in a thick jacket that was at least three sizes too big for her.

“Please come inside and shut the doors,” she said, “I’m freezing.”

None of them had really noticed the cold, but once Sarah mentioned it, Ruby began to shiver. They covered the weapons, making sure the tarpaulin covers were tight and secure. Spider still had a sappy excited look on his face as they entered the bridge and closed the door. There was some kind of heating, though they still hadn’t mastered the controls. With the doors closed it was a lot less cold than outside, but still not quite warm enough to take off their jackets.

“I almost hope we get the chance to use those guns in action.” Said Spider.

“Go too far north and half the Russian Black Sea fleet might give you your wish.” Said Serge.

“I made coffee.” Said Sarah.

“You’re a lifesaver.” Said Spider.

There was actually a map table on the bridge, small but it was better than nothing. The craft had been designed for eight men and three officers and the parts of the boat where the officers tended to go were definitely more spacious and far warmer. Olga spread out a map of the southern Black Sea coast and picked up a marker pen.

“We know we need to keep south,” said Serge, “so where do we go ?”

They all looked at the map and it was obvious that wherever they chose to go to refuel, it was going to be in Turkey.

“There,” said Sarah pointing, “Amasra, I went there on holiday once. A really nice place with lots of boats. We’re bound to find fuel there.”

Olga was glaring, so Spider took Sarah into the galley area to find something to make a mid-morning snack for everyone. Breakfast had been porridge, which they’d all hated. Olga put a large metal ruler over the map.

“Luckily the extra fuel we found at the house means that allowing for bad weather and tides; we can safely reach about here.”

She put a line on the Turkish coast that marked their maximum safe distance, before they ran out of fuel for the thirsty diesel engines.

“Not bad,” said Serge, “further than I thought.”

“Zonguldak looks easily with reach.” He added.

“Too big, it’s a regional capital city. Lots of police and military vessels.” Said Olga.

“We are on an armed Russian patrol boat, which was probably stolen. We need somewhere small and touristy. Somewhere with lots of small marina’s and Jetties.” Said Ruby.

“There’s Filyos a bit further along the coast. It looks smaller.” Said Serge.

Olga pulled a face and shook her head, without offering an explanation. Ruby stabbed her finger at a town that was well within their range and had lots of small jetties.

“Here”, she said, “it looks perfect.”

Serge moved her finger and nodded his head.

“I agree, Amasra fits all our criteria.”

Olga almost ripped the map, pulling it towards her and looking at the place Ruby had been pointing.

“It’s a tourist town.” She said.

“So what ? That makes it perfect.” Said Serge.

“If we go in at night, no one will even notice us among all the tourist boats. They’ll be hundreds of them moored up at this time of year.” Said Ruby.

“Ok, I know when I’m outnumbered.” Said Olga.

Their patrol boat might have been over twenty years old, but everything worked. The navigation system gave Olga a fix on their location and being a military vessel, it didn’t pass on that information to anyone else. Olga ran the ruler over the map again and quickly scribbled a few numbers onto a pad.

“I can set a course and speed to get us there between three and four am tomorrow. It’s at the top end of our range, but still safe.” She said.

“Will it mean manhandling the fuel drums again ?” Asked Serge.

He rubbed his bruised knuckles, dragging the heavy drums across the sands in Dyuni had been brutal work.

“I’m afraid so.” Said Olga.

Spider and Sarah returned, with yet more jugs of fresh coffee and a large plate of assorted biscuits.

“The packets were out of date, but they taste fine.” He said.

They passed coffee to everyone and then Sarah looked at the map.

“So, have you decided ? Where are we going.”

“Amasra.” Said Ruby.

Sarah gave a huge grin and perched herself on the edge of the map table.

“You’ll love it, it’s really pretty and there are some great places to eat.”

“We’re going in at three am in the morning Sarah and we’ll be gone well before first light.” Said Serge.

Sarah looked mortified.

“Really ? Can’t we stay for a day ? I was hoping Berkant’s family might still live there.”

Everyone laughed and passed around the biscuits. Ruby was quite pleased to find a couple of stale but edible garibaldi. They reminded her of better days, with George in London. Everything had been so different then.

“I knew it,” said Spider, “I bet you met this Berkant at the kebab shop.”

Sarah was actually grinning, she seemed to enjoy public airings of her varied and wild private life.

“No, for your information he was my signing on person at the Job Centre.”

Sarah was now playfully punching Spider’s arm as the others ate biscuits and probably wondered what a Job Centre was. Ruby felt that things were now very different, but in many ways things were exactly the same. Bringing friends had been essential, they might even save her sanity.

“Any more garibaldi ?” She asked.

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A phone call to George and a few encrypted emails to Penny and Carlos was stood on a quiet jetty that was only a few miles from where the local fire service were still picking through the wreckage of the house in Dyuni.

“It’s a Go-fast boat.” He said.

Ivan became animated and defensive, if Ivan was his real name. Carlos had been told the time and location and that a Ukrainian man was meeting him. Ivan was the name he’d given, but it was like calling yourself John Smith in London.

“But it’s exactly what you need. Fast, almost invisible to radar and a long range tank has been fitted.” Said Ivan.

The Ukrainian was defending the boat as though he was defending a lover. The price asked began to make sense, it was about three times what the boat was worth.

“I’m not being critical,” said Carlos, “it’s just not what I was expecting. What’s her top speed ?”

Ivan almost swelled with pride as he talked about his boat.

“She’s got a thousand horsepower in her engines and can do a sustained fifty knots. Eighty knots if the water is smooth enough.”

Carlos had seen Go-fast boats elsewhere, usually in the Caribbean, where they were known as ‘Rum Runners.’ Too fast for the local excise agents to catch and with a profile that barely made a blip on radar.

“What have you been smuggling with her ?” Carlos asked.

“Smuggling ? She’s my personal boat, built for pleasure and quick trips along the coast.”

Rose had been left with their motorhome, Carlos had brought Leo to watch his back. Carlos walked towards Leo and indicated that they were leaving.

“Where are you going ?” Asked Ivan.

"There are other boats, ones without owners who try to bullshit me. I need to know who might be looking for your boat, where the locals might hold a grudge. That's why I need to know what you've been smuggling."

Ivan waved him back, the odd east European wave that looked like shooing people away.

"These are troubled times," said Ivan, "people want to move west, medicines are needed in the east and everyone wants the latest weapons. Nothing in Bulgaria though, everything around Odessa and some parts of Russia that are my business."

Carlos was actually impressed, Ivan had worked a part of the Black Sea that most avoided like the plague.

"So how long have you been avoiding the Russian fleet?"

"Two years, it'll be three years in the summer."

Carlos looked at Leo and smiled, he was beginning to understand. Ivan hadn't mentioned drugs coming to the west, but that was understandable.

"And now things are getting a bit tricky for you?"

"I heard rumours, just missed an ambush," said Ivan, "but not round here. Everything has been north, the problem is the fucking Russians."

Carlos stepped onto the fibreglass and carbon fibre boat.

"Any Kevlar in her?" He asked.

"Lots of it, the cabin and engine compartment are as bullet proof as a tank."

The cabin was low and would just about house three people, all space was given to the lower cabin where the contraband would be stored. Two massive engines gave the impressive thousand horsepower that Ivan had been boasting about. The craft was perfect for Carlos and even the trouble Ivan was running from, was in a part of the Black Sea he was sure Ruby would avoid. Light, fast, invisible to most radar, the craft was perfect, apart from being very difficult to handle.

"Your asking price is ludicrous of course." Said Carlos.

Ivan now looked sulky, he obviously didn't like haggling for his much loved boat.

"I might be able to bring it down a little."

Carlos noticed an array of police scanners in the small cabin and the usual ship to shore communications.

"I'll pay you full price and give you the boat back once I'm finished with it. But I have one condition."

Ivan gave him his full attention, his eyebrows raised slightly.

"You come along and drive this thing. You know your boat and the Black Sea."

"How long will you need me for?"

"A week, maybe two at most I imagine."

Ivan nodded his head and Leo brought over their laptop. He sent Penny the code to transfer the money to the bank specified by Ivan. Then they waited for nearly an hour while Ivan used a mobile phone to confirm receipt of the funds with his bank.

"When do we leave?" Asked Ivan.

"Now, we head east at a leisurely pace and wait."

By now Rose was outside and she and Leo carried their equipment on board the Go-fast boat and stowed it in the lower cabin.

"What do we wait for?" Asked Ivan.

"News of the people we're chasing. They'll do something to upset the police or get on the news. They always do!"

Ivan was relaxed until he saw the heavy machine gun and the anti-tank gun carried onto his boat.

"I didn't sign up to anything heavy."

"Yes of course, you've got all the police scanners to listen to the weather." Said Carlos.

Ivan, who Carlos was certain was a local Bulgarian and definitely not called Ivan, started the massive engines and headed west, at an almost sedate thirty knots.

"She's barely ticking over." He boasted to Rose.

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Max stepped out of the car and paid off the driver. He'd taken ludicrous risks to make a quick journey to Istanbul airport, but he'd arrived in time to board one of the two daily flights to Kars in eastern Turkey.

"This is to tell anyone who might ask, that you never saw me."

"Saw who?"

It wasn't a fortune, but the local thug he'd hired to drive him from the border looked happy with the bundle of Euros. Max had stolen a small van to get him to the border, one of the great 'Never Dos' of tradecraft for agents undercover. Then hiring a local drug dealer to be his chauffeur for the day! Max wondered if it was time to call it a day and retire. His risk management company was working efficiently without him. There were several young and keen guys who'd be happy to manage it for him. Take the profits and let young Hendrick get the ulcers! There had been Cynthia of course.

"Fuck you Ruby." He muttered to himself.

Istanbul Atatürk Havalimanı said the huge sign, Istanbul Atatürk Airport. Max was about to cross the road when he realised he still had his bag of weapons and at least four sets of fake ID on him. He was behaving like an amateur and it annoyed him. Tenth busiest airport in the world, every place he could dump his weapons was likely to be checked on a daily basis and he had to assume constant surveillance by CCTV. He cursed terrorists under his breath, he cursed an age when just dumping a leather hold all at an airport was likely to cause a major security event.

There are times when plain luck can be a factor and as Max wondered where to dump the heavy bag, he saw the car he'd arrived in coming back down the road. There was a roundabout and his driver had needed to go around it before heading back towards Bulgaria. It was a bit close to the terminal for such things, there was certain to be someone watching CCTV. But he had no other option, so Max waved down his temporary friend.

"Did you forget something?"

Max kept his small overnight wheelee case, though he had no idea what identity was on the papers it contained. He swung the leather bag up and put it half through the car window.

"These might be of use to you, but please burn the bag."

He looked concerned, who would like to take a bag from a stranger at an airport? But he took the bag and threw it on the rear seat. Once he'd gone, Max entered Terminal 1, the terminal for domestic flights. He found the Turkish Airlines desk and sat among the assorted family groups. Why did families going anywhere by air look so miserable? Max flew a lot and he rarely saw anyone who seemed to enjoy the process. Max dug the passport and other documents out of his bag, the ones he'd put in there at random when he was in Varna.

'Otto Leitner.' So that was who he was now. Otto was a German engineer who was heading east on business and there were several letters to prove it. There was also a German passport, driving license and several credit cards. Marco was meeting him at Kars airport, or rather in the car park of the airport. Marco would know him on sight and Max just hoped there wasn't a bullet waiting for him in Kars. Marco loved money, but sometimes a grudge can outweigh financial common sense. There had been a woman, these things always seemed to be about a woman. Max hadn't killed her,

but he hadn't done anything to save her either. Soon he'd find out if Marco loved the woman more than money.

"I'd like to travel to Kars today." He told the young woman at the desk.

She tapped at her keyboard while looking him over. Oldish German man with a small wheelie case and a pronounced limp. She had him pegged as harmless before her screen showed whether there were any seats left on either of the two daily flights to Kars.

"There is a seat on the thirteen thirty flight. Would you like to purchase a ticket?"

"When does it arrive in Kars?" He asked.

"Two hours later at fifteen thirty."

"That's perfect, I'll take that seat."

He pushed a credit card across to her and watched as she charged the ticket to it. He always had that moment when he hoped there'd be nothing wrong with the card. He often guessed that most other people who travelled covertly had the same anxious few seconds.

"Thank you Mr Leitner, have a good flight."

He had his ticket and about three hours to kill before his flight. It was all routine boredom now. He'd check in and go through the usual over the top security checks. Then he'd find a shop that sold books, almost anything apart from Dan Brown would do. Then he'd find a quiet spot to read until his plane boarded. Sushi, he hoped there was a sushi bar in the departure lounge, but that wasn't essential.

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Their Zhuk class patrol boat crept through the tourist yachts like a great white shark creeping through a school of fish. The engines were quiet when they were going very slow, but their vessel looked completely out of place. Several people had stared at them as they glided past shiny white holiday vessels.

"They'll all be telling their friends." Said Sarah.

It was earlier than Olga had predicted, the Black Sea was unusually calm for the time of year. They'd arrived at Amasra Marina a little before two am. The fuel pumps were designed to be easy to find, there was even an illuminated sign above the diesel pump.

"At least we won't be pulling fuel drums around." Said Spider.

"Bring us in nice and gently." Said Ruby.

Serge edged the patrol boat into the jetty by the pump, barely nudging the bumpers designed to stop anyone hitting the jetty too hard. As he killed the engines, the noises of a party somewhere could be heard.

"Good, the noise will cover up the sound of us cutting the lock on the pump." Said Olga.

She tied their boat to the jetty, while Sarah stepped ashore and had a good stretch.

"It's so nice to be stood on something relatively solid again." She said.

Spider was looking at the lock on the pump when the lights went on, lighting them and the boat up like daylight. A man in uniform was approaching them. Not the usual type of fed up ex-cop who ends up guarding a marina. He was young, he strode with his chest out and his uniform was clean and pressed. Luckily his gaze fell on Sarah instead of Spider and he obviously didn't consider them to be a threat. He was waving them away and speaking fast, too fast for Ruby to follow with her limited Turkish.

"He says the fuel is for marina members only." Said Sarah.

"Tell him we'll pay extra." Said Ruby.

The guard seemed animated, but not hostile. He moved closer to Sarah, probably to get a better look at her. There was more waving of arms and Turkish spoken very quickly.

“He says the tanks are small and we’ll use up all his fuel.”

“Offer to pay him twice the pump price.”

He was looking at them now, taking in Olga and Ruby and ignoring Serge. Spider had hidden behind the pump and had his Browning ready in case of trouble. The guard looked relaxed, but he was shaking his head and pointing out to sea.

“He says no, he’d lose his job. He says we need to try where the fishing boats refuel in the main harbour.”

Ruby nodded at Spider and he began edging his way towards the guard, keeping well out of the light. Sarah realised what was about to happen.

“Let me handle this !”

She made a joke with the guard and then pointed at the building he’d come out of, the door still open. He smiled at her and together they went through the door and closed it behind them. By now the partygoers on a nearby yacht were standing out on deck and staring at the odd looking military vessel that was tied up at the pumps.

“Perfect,” said Olga, “we’re becoming the local tourist attraction.”

“It’s cold, they’ll soon go back inside.” Said Serge.

“What do you think Sarah is doing ?” Asked Spider.

They all gave him a pitying look, everyone could guess what Sarah was doing.

“You know what she’s doing Spider.” Said Ruby. “I just hope she doesn’t piss him off after giving him the blow job.”

Spider put his much loved gun away and sat cross legged on the jetty.

“Couldn’t you have made him give us the fuel ?” He asked.

“Probably, but Sarah knows how much we need more diesel. She’s doing what needs to be done to get it.”

“She shouldn’t have to do that !”

He looked a picture of despondency, all his natural ebullience gone. Ruby felt sorry for him, but she was also angry.

“It was her choice Spider. Are saying that doing it to a guy she met at the local pub on a Friday night is fine, but doing it get our fuel is wrong ?”

He wasn’t going to answer her. Spider picked at the rough wooden boards on the jetty and ignored her.

“It is Friday night. Or more accurately Saturday morning.” Said Serge.

“Really ? I’ve lost track of days recently.” Said Olga.

“Me too.” Said Ruby.

The partygoers did indeed get bored and cold. By the time Sarah returned forty minutes later, they had no audience watching them. The guard was holding her arm and seemed happy.

“We can fill up, but he wants the double payment we promised.” Said Sarah.

“Thank you Sarah. Tell him I’ll pay him in dollars or Euros, it’s his choice.”

There was more muttering as the guard unlocked the pump and allowed Olga to begin filling the diesel tanks of their boat.

“He wants dollars.”

“Fine.”

It took a long time to fill the tanks, but the guard didn't complain. He hung onto Sarah, kissing her like a lover as she untied the boat and stepped onto the deck. He shouted something to her as Serge started the engines and very slowly pulled away from the jetty.

"Is he offering his eternal love?" Asked Olga.

"He's promising to tell everyone the story I gave him." Answered Sarah.

Spider was still talking to no one. He'd come back on board, ignoring the cold and leaning against the forward gun as they left Amasra and headed north east at speed.

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George had acquired a set of keys to Ruby's flat in Hackney. With enough money almost anything can be acquired and the locksmith with the bad reputation had only charged him five hundred pounds.

"A niece is she?" The man had asked with a sneer.

It had crossed his mind to have Carlos thump a little respect into the odious locksmith, but George prided himself on being thick skinned. He opened the heavy outside door, ignoring the graffiti that someone had sprayed on it. Once the door was shut behind him, George picked up the smell of damp and mould.

"Why does she put up with it?" He muttered.

Ruby was constantly moaning about the rent going up every year, yet the landlord obviously viewed any repairs as a needless expense. George had once thought about buying the house from her landlord, but Ruby would know, she always knew everything. She must know he had a set of keys, but she'd never challenged him over it. It could be that she accepted him as being in some way acting in loco parentis. Or of course she simply might not give a damn.

There was music coming from the first door on the right. Bob, the guy who took in her parcels and mail too big to fit through the letterbox. Ruby hadn't talked about Bob much, but he seemed to be on some sort of long term sickness benefit. George ignored Bob's door, Ruby's post could wait with Bob until her return. He climbed the stairs, noticing how the smell of damp was worse on the stairs. George put the key in her flat door and pushed, dislodging a note from Bob that was on top of a mound of everyday post and junk mail.

Ruby,

I took in a recorded delivery, looks like a credit card envelope.

- Bob

He picked up the mail and carried it into the kitchen, putting it all on the kitchen table. There were two more notes from Bob about taking in Amazon parcels. The junk mail he put straight in the bin, sorting her genuine post into various piles. Credit cards, bank statements, store card bills. Didn't Ruby believe in doing anything online? Her kitchen table seemed covered in the effluvia of the consumer society, but none of it told him anything.

"Tea." He said to himself.

He found her earl grey tea and made a cup and then sat at her kitchen table, looking out of the window at the tree Ruby must see every morning. The problem was that he didn't know what he expected to find. Perhaps he'd simply come because he missed her? He could see her answerphone in the tiny entrance hall and it had been turned off. Who turns off their answerphone when they go away? Those with something to hide. George finished his tea and went into her bedroom. There was the first bit of untidiness in the entire flat. Ruby had obviously been selecting clothes to pack and quite a few had been rejected and thrown into a pile on an old armchair. He recognised a top

she often wore and picked it up, hoping to get closer to her in some way. Nothing, no miraculous link that might give him a clue. Clue to what ?

“Why are you here you old fool ?” He shouted at himself.

He sat on her bed, not wanting to invade the privacy of her bedside cabinet, but knowing he had to. There was something in her flat that was important, he knew it, there had to be. George opened the top drawer and pulled out two books. Fantasy books about strange alternate universes. He wondered how Ruby could read and enjoy such drivel. The second drawer down had a writing pad, which he opened to discover nothing but weekly shopping lists. All it told him was what he already knew; she had a thing about Brazil nuts and earl grey tea. She seemed to exist on tea and green salad, but so did most girls of that age. He almost put the pad back in the drawer, but then he noticed the jotting on the back. Lots of swirls and stick men, the sort of doodling everyone does in idle moments.

“Oh, dear God Ruby.” He muttered.

The stick men were all attacking each other in a disturbed way. Some were shooting each other, while some were being decapitated by axes. It was the sort of doodling likely to get someone sent for serious therapy. Below the stick men she’d drawn lots of loops and swirls. For some reason George knew Ruby had created most of the doodles in her sleep, the writing pad was her dream catcher. He looked at the swirls, trying to see a pattern, when he realised they were letters. Not letters in the English alphabet, but in another, perhaps Arabic. George used his iPhone to take a picture of the swirls and sent it to Penny, before calling her.

“I think it’s letters, perhaps Arabic. Can you put it through the computer ?”

He waited while Penny used their own computers and probably the internet to get a meaning for the letters. After several minutes she was back on the phone.

“I hope Ruby isn’t heading there,” Penny said, “it’s Oboy, a small settlement in Turkmenistan. The language in the photograph isn’t Arabic, it’s something far older.”

George was writing his own notes and wondering about who to hire to send to Turkmenistan.

“Where is it near Penny ? Have we got anyone in the area ?”

She was silent for a moment, which was unusual.

“You don’t understand George. Oboy isn’t near anywhere, it’s as close to being in the middle of nowhere as you’re likely to find. It’s east of the Caspian sea, in a part of the world with nothing but bandits and death.”

George laughed.

“Very melodramatic Penny, there must be an airport or a major city somewhere within reach of this place ?”

“No George, there isn’t. East of the Caspian Sea is officially the most dangerous place on earth, there is nothing there. No major cities, no airports. There are few useable roads.”

“How does the computer tell you to get there then ?”

Once again penny was silent.

“Everything I’m looking up tells you to stay away from east of the Caspian, George. Only a fool or a mad person would go there.”

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Carlos was lucky and often a bit of good luck can be enough. A local radio station in Amasra had a very ambitious lady in their news department. If one desk and a rather old PC could really be called a news department. Nilgün heard from a friend that the night guard at the town’s one and only Marina had given all the diesel fuel to a beautiful Russian spy. Of course it had to be a ‘Friday night

story,' like the UFO hovering over the town the previous summer. Nilgün had heard it all and seen it all and sometimes, even in Turkey, some of it was due to too much drink. She could have ignored the rumour, or gone to check it out in the morning. Instead she got into her elderly Skoda and drove down to the marina. Her friend had told her the guard was strutting about and telling everyone about the beautiful blonde Russian spy. He was still talkative when she arrived, but he was beginning to wonder how long he might still be employed as a guard.

"She tricked me, they're trained to do that, aren't they?"

His office was small, a couch in one corner that had a few blankets on it. Nilgün picked up the trace of a woman's perfume and began to understand how the beautiful blonde might have tricked him.

"Did you have sex with her?" She asked.

"We only had time for a Bill Clinton."

He was grinning at her, his eyes going all over her body. She believed him, especially when one bleary eyed partygoer turned up at the office with a picture on a smart phone.

"They were here for nearly two hours."

Nilgün wasn't an expert in military vessels and there were no Russian markings, but she knew a patrol boat when she saw one. None of the crew were in uniform, but one man was leaning against a tarpaulin that seemed to be covering a mounted machine gun. She had the picture sent to her own phone and decided she might try and sell the story to one of the big papers in Istanbul.

"Tell me everything?" She said.

"Her name was Irena and they were scouting ahead of the Russian fleet....."

Nilgün broadcast the story as an amusing piece of nonsense and then sent her serious copy to a friend on the Daily Sabah in Istanbul. She hoped it might earn her a better job and way out of local radio in Amasra.

Carlos got lucky because, as people do all over the world, the locals believed the story. Some imagined the Russian fleet was waiting a few miles offshore and would begin pounding the coastline that day.

"It'll be like the Ukraine!" He heard on the radio.

People on boats were chatting, some breaking all the rules and using the emergency channel. The scanners on Ivan's boat could listen in to it all and there was a lot to listen to.

"The blonde told him the Russian's are spying out the entire coast."

"I knew it, you can't trust the Russians. They've always hated us."

Living close to a powerful nation that you've had numerous wars with can make any nation a little paranoid. Carlos listened to the stories about the beautiful Irena on board a Russian patrol boat and knew exactly who it was.

"That crazy bitch Sarah might end up starting world war three." He said.

Leo was too sea sick to be much use, they were all a little sea sick. The light boat seemed to bounce on the top of every wave and there was an unsettling sideways wobble all the time.

"Everyone gets sick on these types of boats, but not me, never." Ivan had told him.

Rose spread out a map in the tiny cabin and pointed to Amasra.

"Can you really give us eighty knots Ivan?" Carlos asked.

"Only on sea that is completely flat. On a choppy sea in winter I can give you sixty knots."

"Where do we try and intercept them?" He asked Rose.

She had a pocket calculator, but a lot of it was going to be guesswork. Ruby was heading east along the Turkish coast, that much was obvious, but her speed wasn't.

"We have the time it took them to get from Dyuni to Amasra." Said Rose.

In the air force they called it dead reckoning, a joke claimed if you got it wrong you'd end up dead. Rose held up the calculator so that Carlos could see her tap in the figures and share her assumptions and perhaps some of the blame if it all went wrong.

"There," she said, "marking a featureless area of the Black Sea. But it'll still be like looking for a needle in a haystack."

Ivan tapped the co-ordinates into the navigation system on his boat and they all heard the growl as the massive engines took up the challenge of giving them a speed of sixty knots. Most people think of boats as being a slow and sedate way to travel, but sixty knots is seventy miles an hour. The sea either side of the boat was lit by a crescent moon and they seemed to be rushing towards waves at a terrifying rate. Leo simply groaned and leaned closer to the bucket he held.

"It gets easier after the first couple of hours." Said Ivan.

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Max had found Marco to be in good spirits, despite a long wait because Max's flight had been delayed. He'd found his old enemy in a dust covered estate car in the airport car park.

"Welcome to Kars, shit hole of the east." Marco had said.

Marco had driven in through Georgia and assured him the border was as porous as ever.

"You could take an artillery piece into Georgia from the Turkish side."

As if to illustrate the point, Marco opened the back doors of the estate car and showed him enough weaponry to start a small war. It was all fairly old and low tech, but still very deadly.

"You never said how many men you needed, so I came prepared."

"That should be enough." Max had said.

Now Marco was driving them around Lake Çıldır and heading towards the border. It appeared the border near Öncül was particularly open and Max trusted Marco to know the area better than him. They drove down towards the lake and parked in what must have been a beauty spot in the summer.

"I hate to mention money, but you did make a few promises." Said Marco.

Max recovered his case from the rear of the vehicle and sat on a grubby park bench.

"It's beautiful here in the summer," said Marco, "all the kids come here to fuck."

Max paid him the amount they'd agreed and let his old enemy see that there were still a lot of dollars left in his case.

"We'll need reliable men," said Max, "at least a dozen. The sort who know how to keep their mouths shut afterwards."

Marco sat on the bench and smiled at him. Max could see at least four sets of dog tags around his neck and wondered if any were genuinely his.

"Things are peaceful in Georgia now Max and peace is boring and doesn't fill your pockets. I can get you a hundred good men by tonight."

"A dozen will do, but no fools. The group we'll be hunting aren't as harmless as they look."

Max gave him details of Ruby and her friends, leaving out any mention of her gift. Soldiers tend to be superstitious and he thought that even Marco might not want to take on a girl who could shred the flesh off her enemies. Ruby was likely to kill a lot of Marco's men, but Max was hoping a dozen would be enough, someone had to be able to hit her with enough bullets to kill her.

"So Max, where do I tell the men I hire to meet us?"

Max put his copy of the famous map on the bench, yet another colour photocopy of the map that had been in the DGSE file on Das Geheimnis. There were lots of red arrows and jottings in various languages he couldn't read, but he was fairly certain Ruby would be heading for Batumi. It not only

had a red ring round it, someone had put a huge yellow tick mark over it. But where from there ? East of course Ruby seemed to be heading east towards another set of jottings on the shore of the Caspian Sea. It was a guess, but Max knew he had to commit his new force to a place and time.

“Here ! We go here and wait for them to come to us. Then we kill them all.”

“Khulo,” said Marco, “I know the road there, lots of good places to set up an ambush.”

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Ivan was the only one left in the small upper cabin and it was his decision to slow down and listen to the sound of gunfire. Night had arrived again and Ivan had been nervous about travelling at sixty knots in the dark. Carlos felt the boat slow down and came to see why, noticing that Leo seemed far better.

“Getting over your sickness ?” Carlos asked.

“I need some action. Too much time to sit about and feel sorry for myself.”

Carlos carried on up to the tiny upper cabin, where Ivan had his head high above the cabin entrance. “Listen.”

Carlos listened and the sound of single shots was joined by the unmistakable sound of a heavy machine gun.

“Might be a smuggler running into a Turkish patrol boat.” Said Ivan.

“Or it might be the people I’m looking for.”

Carlos shouted for Rose and Leo, telling them to bring the special weapons. Ivan seemed amused at them carrying heavy weapons up the narrow steps until Leo began to use a rivet gun to fix the anti-tank gun in place.

“Hey, what the hell are you doing to my boat ?” He shouted.

“Actually it’s my boat now.” Said Carlos.

The heavy machine gun was fixed to the other side, the rivets finding a solid footing in the carbon fibre hull.

“My hearing is giving gun shots all over the place.” Said Rose.

“They’re that way.” Said Ivan pointing a few degrees to starboard.

Carlos nodded and Ivan swung the long, narrow boat slowly round and headed towards the sound of the gun fire. Flames were the first thing they saw in the dark, a burning patrol boat of some kind, though no markings could be seen on it.

“There’s a body in the water, wearing a uniform.” Said Leo.

Rose swung a spotlight towards the spot and a body was floating face down in the water, a man, though no insignia could be seen to identify what organisation he belonged to. Then Rose caught the front of the burning boat in the light and they could see the sign that said ‘POLIS,’ in large white capital letters.

“They met someone who had them outgunned.” Said Ivan.

The Turkish police vessel was burning and sinking fast, there seemed to be no survivors. The sound of the heavy machine gun continued though and Rose swung the light round.

“We’re too far away Ivan,” said Carlos, “that way, get us closer.”

Ivan seemed better at judging where the sounds were coming from than them, he gently moved their boat through the burning debris and towards the sound of the shots. Rose gasped as her swinging light fell on the Zhuk class patrol boat, illuminating Ruby stood beside the forward gun and pointing at something.

“Good God, we’ve found them !” Shouted Carlos.

Spider was at the forward gun, firing hundreds of rounds at a target they couldn't see. Carlos lost sight of Ruby as Rose swung the light at the second Turkish police launch, the one that was heading straight for them and likely to crash straight into their prow. Carlos could see spider's bullets ripping into the side of the police vessel, he could see the look of horror on the face of the man behind the wheel as he saw the Go-fast boat in his path.

Leo saw the threat and didn't wait for orders. He aimed the anti-tank gun straight at the cabin of the police launch and fired.

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