

## Ruby V : Machu Picchu

### Chapter 14 – Limbo and Back

**“Ruby knew Kallina’s history as well as she knew her own. Taken at face value from what Kallina had told her over many nights with wine and pizza, she’d been born on the Eurasian Steppe, in the year seventeen hundred and two. Born into a nomadic group who traded in horses. Cossacks probably, though Kallina had never used that term.”**

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Lorenzo had thought they’d be following the bus, as it headed for the dig site in the mountains. In another hire car of course, on yet another one of his fake IDs. He quite fancied being Thomas Notley for a while, a realtor from Panama. Eugenie had been keen on the idea too. Ruby had used logic and common sense to put an end to the notion of them following the bus. She’d visited their hotel to give them the CIA verdict on the deaths of the two cult members and to give them fresh orders. “No, you can’t sleep in a hired hatchback for days.” Ruby had said. “The locals will definitely spot you; they’re already talking about the police patrolling the woods. They might even set about you both with pitchforks and shovels.”

And so, Lorenzo’s hope of seeing a little more of the Peruvian mountains evaporated. Eugenie hadn’t immediately given up on the idea, but in the end.....Ruby was the boss. Ruby had gone on to mention the CIA being pleased that there were two less members of the Colonel’s cult. As for their new orders.....

“Stay in Lima and watch the house.” Ruby had said. “Carry on living here in the hotel and watch the outside of Alessia House during the day. I have a feeling the Colonel won’t give up trying to hurt us. No involving DINI unless it’s an emergency.”

Lorenzo wasn’t stupid; he knew that involving DINI was likely to upset the Americans, the CIA. Ruby had done it slowly and carefully, yet he could see it. Ruby had become deeply involved with the CIA and by association, so had everyone with her. On the plus side, Eugenie had decided to hire a small van as a mobile observation centre, so he’d had a chance to be Thomas Notley from Panama. They were both currently sat in the FIAT van, watching the house through a very grubby side window. “Oh, these coconut macaroons are so good.” Said Eugenie. “I’m getting addicted to them.”

It had become a morning routine, or at least the start of a routine. Coffee and something to nibble, the best the local supermarket could provide. Foxy’s people would have frowned on a routine; they could be spotted by your adversary. Foxy’s surveillance teams probably consisted of over a dozen people though, walking through an area seemingly at random. For Lorenzo and Eugenie it was just them and they needed coffee.

“Someone’s ringing the doorbell.” Said Lorenzo.

“No problem, that’s the gardening guy’s son.” Said Eugenie.

Ruby had described some of the regular visitors to the house, not that there were many. Eugenie could look into a mind briefly and accurately. The gardening guy was in the man’s mind and the rest was adding up two and two. He also looked like a younger version of gardening guy.

“He’s not on the list.” Said Lorenzo.

“Yeah, we’ll probably get a few of those.....Relatives of the cleaners and gardeners.” Said Eugenie.

Someone opened the door and let the man inside. Total security on Alessia House was impossible, they were there to spot people who didn't look or feel right. It was going to be tedious, though Lorenzo had promised to never use the B word, bored. Eugenie had bought a portable DVD player. They were going to take it in turns to watch a classic movie in the afternoons. There had to be something to ease the tedium, or they'd end up clawing at one another like feral cats.

"I wonder what the real Thomas Notley is doing today." Said Lorenzo.

"Probably getting showered and dressed to begin a hard day of realtoring, or whatever it's called."

An hour later a man in a UPS uniform rang the doorbell and gave someone a small package. Probably something for Ruby, or maybe something from London for Todd. Like everyone coming to the house, Lorenzo took several pictures of the UPS guy. Back at the hotel, he'd cross reference known names to some of the pictures.

"At least the pictures stop it being so....." He began.

"Stop.....Don't you dare say the B word.....We agreed on that. Never say the B word."

They exchanged a grin that was close to being a smirk. All Lorenzo could think about was that it was only their third day.....How would they be handling it if it went on for months ?

"More macaroons ?" He asked.

"We'll get fat." Said Eugenie. "But yes.....And more coffee."

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Cal wasn't that worried about spiders and crawling insects, but she'd still slept in a partitioned off room in one of the new trailers. Everything was new and shiny, like a hotel, though no one came to change the towels or make her bed. Shared facilities of course, there had been a queue to get a shower. All of that didn't worry her; she'd coped with far worse. Privacy was the problem, a trailer full of people she knew and didn't want to yell at. Once they were up and about, no one respected her privacy. Todd had mentioned it being like a college dormitory, though he seemed to like the overall vibe.

Cal had things to do, a lot of experimenting with the new gifts left to her by Baba Yaga.

Experimenting might mean something wonderful occurring, or looking like an idiot. She'd explained her feelings to Sarah, who'd helped her erect one of the tents no one was now going to sleep in. Spider had helped too, hammering in tent pegs and shifting things around. By the time they'd finished, Cal had what she thought of as the perfect place to test a few ideas. As Spider had put it.....

"You're some way from the camp. Set the tent alight and no one is going to be too upset."

"Fire isn't really my thing." She'd told him.

Of course Sarah was the one with practical advice.

"Get a tin of bug spray, or you'll be knee deep in creepy crawlies." She'd told her.

Cal was now sat on her own in her new canvas research laboratory, or at least that was how she viewed the tent. A palace, her private palace where no one else was welcome, unless she invited them, or they were bringing food.

"I hope you survive this.....You're my pioneer, my explorer, my Ferdinand Magellan."

She spoke to a spider in a large specimen jar that Mars had found for her. Cal liked Mars, though she couldn't explain to her why she needed the jar. Cal realised she was soon going to be known as the strange taciturn girl who spent all day in a tent.

"All for the science Ferdinand, all for the science." Cal muttered.

The spider was large and for all she knew, its bite might be poisonous. Cal had scooped it up into the jar from a corner of the tent. The first arachnid invader of her new space, was going to be her first

test subject. A few holes punched in the lid of the jar and Ferdinand was ready to go where no spider had been before. Cal held the jar against her forehead and felt for what made the spider unique, its essence. There probably weren't any Peruvian spiders in the place she thought as Limbo, so bringing Ferdinand back again was likely to be easy. Cal concentrated on the spider until she could have picked him out in an entire room full of spiders. She then placed the jar on the floor.

"Please come back alive." She mumbled.

Sending Ferdinand in his glass jar was easy after that, just three words in a language Baba Yaga seemed to have gifted to her and a two hand gestures. The jar vanished, like a space capsule taking her spider to a new world. Ferdinand probably was going to be the first spider to ever visit Limbo. He had to stay there for a while of course for the test to mean anything. Cal sat for half an hour, her head down, while she looked at the tent's groundsheet.

"Time to come home Ferdinand." She muttered.

There was a weird tapping sound. It took her a while to realise it was someone trying to knock on the flimsy surface of the tent's door. Sophie's voice came from outside of her research lab.

"Can I come in, Cal ?"

"Yes....Please do.....I'm about to bring Ferdinand back."

Keeping Sophie on her side was important, she was essential to step two in the exploration of Limbo, even if she was unaware of that. Sophie was looking around the inside of the empty tent.

"Nice.....Minimalist, I like that." Said Sophie. "Who is Ferdinand ?"

"A spider in a jar, my explorer of new worlds."

"Ahhh, good." Said Sophie. "I was worried about explaining to Ellie, why there was one less student around the table at dinner."

"No human subjects.....Not yet." Said Cal.

It took a while for her to sense Ferdinand. Finding the cups and plates she'd sent while still at the hotel in Huancayo had been easy. She'd even sent and recovered several guava fruits. Maybe a living thing was different, though she eventually sensed his essence. He looked like a lattice of energy in her mind, rather than a solid object.

"Found him." She muttered.

No words this time, just a lot of concentrating on the spider's essence and a hand gesture. When it appeared, the jar was on its side, as if something had pushed it over. Inside was Ferdinand, still alive and wandering around the inside of his glass space capsule. Cal picked up the jar and looked at him.

"He's perfect, Sophie." She said, "Exactly the same as when I sent him to Limbo."

"Where ?" Asked Sophie.

"Just my name for it.....Eugenie said the place has many names."

"It does and some of those names indicate it's not a nice place." Said Sophie. "You really shouldn't send anyone there, they might not come back."

"Eugenie has been there." Said Cal. "I want to send something larger next, something like a rabbit. There must be rabbits in these woods, they seem to be everywhere in the world. I need something larger than a spider, with a placid temperament. I can build a cage.....Though I was hoping you'd help me catch it."

Cal could see it in Sophie's eyes; she was beginning to think of her as the crazy girl experimenting in an empty tent.

"I will help you Cal, on one very solid, carved in stone condition." Said Sophie. "No sending people there, or going yourself.....Unless you and I talk it over with Ruby first. Do you agree ?"

No I forbid it, or a firm never in a million years. It sounded like the end of the road for going to Limbo, but Ruby might agree, if asked in the right way.

“Fine, you have my word. No going to Limbo, or sending the students.....Unless Ruby agrees.”

“Firstly, there are no rabbits in the woods here, but there are small, relatively harmless mammals. Get Ellie involved in building cages, she may well find a student or two to help....We are seen as big news here at the moment. Tell them about doing a study on indigenous mammals.....Yada-yada. Make it sound dull and they’ll quickly ignore the girl who sits in the tent all day.”

“Thank you Sophie, I’d never have thought of that.” Said Cal. “Will you help me catch the creatures I need ?”

“Against my better judgement, yes I will.” Said Sophie “Vizcacha are what you need, they’re all over this region. Like a rabbit crossed with a squirrel. Get the cages made and we’ll go and catch a few Vizcacha.”

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Ruby knew Kallina’s history as well as she knew her own. Taken at face value from what Kallina had told her over many nights with wine and pizza, she’d been born on the Eurasian Steppe, in the year seventeen hundred and two. Born into a nomadic group who traded in horses. Cossacks probably, though Kallina had never used that term. The problem with the official story of her history, was that Kallina seemed to have been around a lot longer than a mere three hundred and twenty, or so years. Now Ruby was beginning to think of deathless Baba Yaga, meaning she could pass something on and not just her witchcraft skills. Like a flame passed from candle to candle over the years, Baba Yaga might well have left at least part of herself in Cal. It definitely solved the problem of Baba Yaga appearing to have been around since before the last ice age. Ruby was currently handling the bronze figure of a woman, with Baba Yaga runes on its back.

“I knew it would interest you, Ruby.” Said Ellie. “We’ve found some wonderful items, but this.....It shouldn’t be here, not in Peru. The bronze figure of a famous East European witch. I’m afraid to tell the university, they’ll think I’ve become insane.”

Ruby liked Ellie; she’d liked her since the first of several phone conversations. A very shallow look into her mind, showed a woman given a senior role, when she’d much rather have been out there, in a trench with a trowel in her hand. Not that Professor Ellie Nicholas wasn’t good at running the dig site. There was a conflict though between what the job required, and what she’d rather have been doing.

“You’re right; I am mainly interested in your finds relating to Baba Yaga.” Said Ruby. “Nothing academic, purely a personal interest. I was hoping to see the standing stone you found early on. The one mentioned in a magazine article.”

“Oh, that magazine....Half misinformation and half lies.” Said Ellie. “Click bait junk in print format. The university considered litigation against them.”

“But you said the picture of the stone is genuine.” Said Ruby. “I hope it is, that’s what made me determined to come here.”

“Yes, Ruby.....It’s there, not far from where your bus is parked.” Said Ellie. “You can see everything, no limits. If you like, we can go there now. I was rather hoping you might be able to read the entire stone. My knowledge of runes of that age.....I’ll admit it, I can read only a tiny part of it.”

“I can’t read them, but I’m fairly certain Cal will be able to.” Said Ruby.

“Ahhh the mystery girl in the tent.....It’s a quiet life here, on the whole. There are sightings of police in the woods, but.....Sorry, your Cal is already the number one item in site gossip.”

Ruby wasn't worried about gossip, they'd soon get bored with watching a girl who simply refused to engage, or satisfy their curiosity. The police business though.....There were no police in the woods, Spider had made several calls to confirm that. Ellie didn't need to know, it might scare her. There were men in the woods; several of the students had seen them. Whoever they were, they weren't the police, or DINI, the CIA, or just about anyone else who might be watching them. The dig site seemed a bit off the beaten track for the Colonel and his minions, but he was still her prime suspect. Once outside of the tent Ellie was using as an office, the air felt cooler and less sticky.

"Spider." Yelled Ruby. "Please find Cal and bring her to the standing stone."

"The stone is near your bus." Added Ellie.

Sophie arrived too, despite not being invited. They were soon all looking at the standing stone, the one featured in the now infamous magazine feature. It looked quite dull and grubby, for something that had caused so much interest. Not that large either, tiny compared to the stone circle at Avebury.

"There.....I recognise it now." Said Sophie. "The Baba Yaga runes."

"Can you read the rest of the runes?" Asked Ellie.

"No, none of it." Said Sophie.

"Cal will be able to read it." Said Ruby.

Cal had been given many gifts by Baba Yaga, including a language that pre-dated Sumerian by a few thousand years. It seemed unthinkable that Cal wouldn't know how to read the runes.

"I'm not sure.....It's just all swipes and dashes." Said Cal.

"Somewhere your mind knows.....Trust it. I know you can read the stone." Said Ruby.

Cal went right up to the stone and looked it up and down several times.

"A mixture of runes from several ages and different peoples." Said Cal. "I can see the patterns and know the meaning though it still doesn't make sense."

"Why Cal? What does it say?" Asked Ruby.

"Baba Yaga is named and there is a lot of praise about her deeds." Said Cal. "It's like a eulogy, which is explained by the last part. It says this is her final resting place."

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Penny Green had felt George shouldn't have inflicted Abe on her, without some kind of discussion about it. The London office was hers now; George was looking after the small Polandrous office in Paris. It had been his idea to slow down a bit, to spend more time at the hotel with Malou. Penny had fumed about him into her mirror that morning, until her image in it made her chuckle. So many ghastly frown lines.....

"He means well and Ruby seems to think a lot of Abe." She'd muttered to herself.

Her morning routine in the office was fairly rigid, certain actions were required of her, or the Polandrous Foundation couldn't function. Reports needing signing off, liquidity needed to be verified. They were now viewed as a bank in some areas, following an ongoing overhaul of regulation by various government departments. Penny muttered to herself about politicians involving themselves in a business they didn't understand, but really.....She loved every minute of her job, even the morning paperwork.

Coffee and a pastry had become a ten thirty ritual, almost a rite of passage to the time of day when she could get out of her office. Like George before her, she appreciated the importance of being seen. Accounts first, they'd just upgraded their back office systems. More coffee with them, it was traditional and worth having to use the ladies room on the third floor.

Polandrous owned the building, via a web of offshore companies and a shell corporation in the Bahamas. There was still one floor being rented by a software company. They had no idea that Penny was effectively their landlord. On Mondays Penny had coffee with Peter, who ran the software company. It was a pleasant part of her Monday, even if it did mean another stop for a pee. Peter had moaned about the greedy offshore landlord putting off redecoration of the main staircase for another year. Penny had made all the right noises; she was becoming quite a decent actress. By just a minutes or so before midday, she was sat next to Abe and asking if he was alright. The usual routine with new people, making sure they were happy and being looked after. Cal's brother was very smart in what looked like a new suit and shirt. Monique's treat to him probably. He had an open notebook on his desk, full of everything he'd learned that morning, or at least been told. He'd learn it all gradually, as he became a valued member of the dealing floor. In spite of being bombarded with information for three hours, Abe still looked happy.

"Everyone has been so helpful." Said Abe. "This is what I've always wanted to do."

It was the speed that grabbed her attention; it wasn't the usual reaction speed to a stapler being knocked off the edge of the desk. Abe wasn't the usual kind of trainee though; he was a wunderkind, even if no one had known he was out there, living in Somalia. Penny's elbow had nudged the stapler and Abe had grabbed it before it hit the ground. The speed, the way his arm had shot out.....It was amazing, though she hoped no one else had noticed. For Penny the strange and unusual wasn't actually all that strange, or unusual. Not now, not after being around Ruby for so many years.

"I get busy, but you can come and see me with any problems." Said Penny. "Everyone here wants to see you make a success of the position. Any problems.....Let me know."

"I will, Penny.....I promise I will."

Penny, when everyone else now tended to call her Miss Green, whether she liked it or not. It was nice, having someone around who used her first name. Her opinion of Abe was changing a little from slightly wary, to mild approval. Penny muttered at herself in the lift, on her way back to her top floor office.

"Smart, keen and a good attitude.....He'll do well, I know it."

As the lift door opened, Penny realised a truth Monique and George had probably already thought about. Hopefully no one would attack the building again, or any employees of the Polandrous Foundation. If they did though.....It would be nice to have one of Ruby's young super people in the building.

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Eugenie had a finishing hour in her mind, even though Ruby hadn't mentioned start and stop times for the observation of Alessia House. Going back to the hotel too early felt like being lazy. On the other hand, sitting in a hired van all day was mind numbingly tedious. It was staggeringly boring, though she'd have thumped Lol if he'd used the B word. Not even the kind of boredom where you could take long naps, they had to remain awake and alert. There had been a moment at about three in the afternoon, when Eugenie had walked to the supermarket to use the bathroom, out of pure, unadulterated boredom.

"Coming up to six Lol and I'm hungry." She said. "Shall we call today over?"

"Oh yes, we need proper food." Said Lol. "I never.....Ever....Want to see another coconut macaroon."

"Coconut overdose, my guts don't feel right." She said.

Eugenie could have chosen five, or five thirty and Lol wouldn't have noticed anything. It was one of those moments when the universe smiled on you, or it was just pure dumb luck.

"A bit late for gardening isn't it?" Asked Lol.

“Yes, they’re usual employed on a get the job done and finish basis, in the morning.” She said. He was coming out of the house, the middle aged man carrying a garden rake. It wasn’t him who caught Eugenie’s eye, it was his friend almost hidden by bush. Slightly crouched over and carrying a muddy shovel, though Eugenie knew the face. The grey hair and beard, the vaguely military look about him.

“It’s him, Lol.....It’s them, the Colonel and his thugs.” Said Eugenie.

By the time she was out of the van they’d gone. No side alleys, the Colonel must have gone towards the supermarket, or the other way towards where there were large hotels, including the one where Lol and her were staying.

“He moves fast for a man with a limp.” Said Lol. “I see them, about halfway to the main road.”

“Quick, follow them on foot.” Said Eugenie. “If they get in a car, remember the number.”

She grabbed his arm before he could move.

“Remember Lol, these people are killers.....Be careful.” She said.

“Oh, I will.....I’m not the hero type. Where are you going ?”

“They left the Alessia House door slightly open. I’ll join you after a quick look inside.” She said.

She had to give it to him; Lol could move quickly and keep hidden, if he had to. Eugenie watched him use parked cars for cover, as he followed the Colonel and his men head down the road. The Colonel had two cult members with him, so there was likely to be a vehicle waiting somewhere. The problem was that for someone who claimed not to be a hero, Lol could be too brave, too keen on pushing his luck.

“Be safe.” She muttered.

No need to look far inside the house, one of the cleaners was lying on the hall floor. Eugenie didn’t know her, though she’d be on Ruby’s list of those regularly entering the house. No professional kill, no quick and clean end. She’d been stabbed multiple times in her neck and chest. It looked like the frenzied work of a psychopath. The body was warm to the touch; the woman hadn’t been dead for long.

“Fucking animals.” Muttered Eugenie.

She closed the door on the way out and Eugenie wouldn’t be making a call to the police. There were cleaners who arrived to give the kitchens a quick clean, at around six thirty. Far better not to get involved and leave reporting the murder to them. It would probably ruin their day and give them nightmares for a while, but nothing could be done about that. Eugenie sat back in their van, waiting for Lol to return. She heard the police sirens about ten minutes after two cleaners had entered the house. Still no sign of Lol, but she had bought them each a cheap burner phone on a local network. A voice call might give away his position, if Lol was close to the Colonel. Eugenie sent the first text as the police arrived.

‘Lol are you alright ?’ There was no reply.

Like police the world over, it seemed to take at least a dozen of them to answer a call, driving at least half a dozen vehicles. By the time an ambulance arrived, it had to park on someone’s driveway.

‘Lol I’m worried please reply.’ There was no reply.

At about seven forty, the police had been joined by several plain clothes police, or at least men and women who gave off a distinct cop vibe. Eugenie decided it was time to call Lol. Her call went straight to voicemail.

“Fuck.” She muttered.

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Sarah would never have called herself an archaeologist, though she had watched every episode of Time Team, some more than once. She saw the dig site as her big chance to get involved in making a few genuine discoveries. No hoping to find a horde of gold coins, or a big shiny sword. Sarah knew that the finds that mattered, were often quite ordinary looking. Like the bronze figure Ellie was letting her handle. Sarah was holding the figure as though it was made out of eggshells.

"This could really change the history books?" Asked Sarah.

"Oh yes, it shouldn't be here in Peru." Said Ellie. "Among grave goods in a barrow in Eastern Europe is where it should be, but even then.....Nowhere as old as this dig site."

"How old is it?" Asked Spider.

"That....Depends on an interpretation of the finds, we're still working on a date. Machu Picchu was once thought to be incredibly old, yet we now know it's no more than six hundred years old."

"This site could be five thousand years old." Said Mars.

"We're not sure about it yet, Mars." Said Ellie. "But.....That may turn out to be accurate."

Sarah tried to think of something five thousand years old and failed. That was around three thousand BC and a memory popped up about that being the time of the Old Kingdom in Egypt. As Spider would have put it, it was a hell of a long time ago.

"The bronze age had started by then." Said Jim. "It's just the mix of artefacts here.....It doesn't make sense. As though someone brought grave goods from Europe."

"We're hoping to find a tomb." Said Ellie. "The tomb of a high ranking individual.....Though even that would be unlikely to answer all our questions."

"Whoever finds the tomb, gets two weeks in a hotel, with full room service. You can even take a partner with you." Said Mars.

"Just a local hotel, I'm not being too lavish with the prize." Said Ellie.

Poor Ellie, she seemed worried that Ruby might hear of her money going on something other than pure archaeology. Sarah knew Ruby wouldn't mind, incentives could produce excellent results.

"Can we help?" Asked Spider.

"Yes, there must be places you haven't dug." Said Sarah. "Spider and I can help look for the tomb."

"Oh, I don't know.....Some places are waterlogged, but the undug places tend to have topsoil like concrete. It'll be very hard work." Said Ellie.

"And there's the matter of the prize, the hotel." Said Jim.

"We'll raffle the prize if we win." Said Spider. "Come on.....Give us a pick and a shovel."

"Then point us at a place to dig." Added Sarah.

"Alright Jim, you heard them." Said Ellie. "Find some digging equipment for our new volunteers."

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Lily knew Thio had a bit of a crush on her. Crush, a really cheesy word that brought back memories of secondary school and Nate. Where was Nate these days, she wondered? Lily thought it'd be nice if everyone was on a list somewhere, so you could look up past loves, without them knowing. Nothing sinister, just to know they were alright. But what if they weren't alright? Anyway, as she thought it through, her list idea sounded suspiciously like stalking.

"Walk quietly, Thio." She said. "The cops in the woods might be many things, but Ruby is fairly certain they're not cops."

"Only fairly certain?"

"There are lot of people wanting to know our comings and goings." Said Lily. "Some of their organisations might be lying about not watching us."



It was in Thio's eyes, the look that told her he had a crush on her. Lily liked to think she was a reasonably attractive young woman. She'd even gotten over the long held belief that her bum was slightly too large. Add on befriending him when everyone else thought he might be a traitor.....And she could understand the crush. Harmless and eventually he'd get over it. The crush wasn't reciprocated. Thio was a nice enough guy, just not her type. Nate had been her type and he was likely to be married by now, with maybe a kid on the way. Maybe a barcode.....So you could look them all up, all the people who'd been important to you at one time or another ? No, still sounded like authoritarian stalking.

"There.....A blue tent." Said Thio. "Behind a tree on that ridge, but you can just about see it."

Thio was pointing and in the wood on the ridge, on the far side of a hillside covered in scree and behind a tree....Was a hint of blue, the sort of blue associated with tents. Getting to the tent by the straight route would be suicide, if someone with an assault rifle was watching the hillside. Getting there silently over scree, was just as insane. Ideally they'd go back for one of the wunderkinds; Sophie always seemed ready for trouble if it arrived. The problem was that Lily was getting fed up with them running down all her MI6 training, even Spider did it. There had been a few angry words, so Lily wasn't about to admit she needed backup.

"There is a way to stay among the trees." She said. "A long route though, we'll have an hour of hard climbing over rough ground."

"I don't mind." Said Thio. "I will do my best to walk quietly."

They were both armed of course, despite Ruby's new ideas on morality. Lily usually agreed, but given the situation, a decent nine millimetre automatic was nice to have, with a couple of spare clips. She was close to going for Sophie, until she saw the look on Thio's face. Not just a crush, he trusted her.....No need for a Ruby style mind link, it was all there, in his eyes. Lily just hoped she wasn't about to get them both killed.

"Rule one, Thio." She said. "Anything happens to me and you run back to the dig site."

"Fine, I will."

There was a small area of scree to cross, which made it sound as if they were a small army, a clumsy small army. A long way from the tent up on the ridge though, too far away for anyone to hear. Lily still felt relieved when they reached the treeline, without anyone shooting at them. She knew how to almost vanish in a thick wood and Thio was learning all the time.

"Now.....A nice steady trudge to the edge of the ridge." Said Lily.

"Cal asked me to keep an eye out for rabbits." Said Thio. "I have no idea why."

"Hmmm this came up with Todd once." Said Lily. "Like crows, there are no rabbits in South America. A few small mammals that look a bit rabbit, but aren't really rabbits. I might be wrong of course....."

"Easier to tell her we couldn't find any." Said Thio.

The top of the ridge was slightly higher than where the blue tent had been erected. They had a slight height advantage and in about twenty minutes, the sun would be behind them. It took them all of those twenty minutes, to find the men's campsite. Still some way off when Lily went down on her tummy, pulling Thio with her. A short crawl into the plants at the base of a tree and.....They could see the men, without being seen by them. Lily whispered into Thio's ear.

"Really quiet now.....Breathe quietly."

"What do we do now ?" He whispered back.

A good question and although Lily had a few ideas, she needed a moment to think. There were three men wearing blue clothing, that did look a little like a police uniform, at a distance. There was one

hunting rifle leant against a tree, but there could be anything in the tent. If.....And it was a big if, there were no automatic weapons available, Lily thought they stood a chance. Three men who looked half asleep and Lily had the sun behind her. Thio might be some use, though she was relying on her own expertise to deal with the three men dressed in blue. Youngish men with no grey beards or hair. If the Colonel was around somewhere, he wasn't in the camp. "Alright, Thio." She whispered. "This is what we're going to do....."

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