

Ruby

Chapter 1 – The Party

“He’d smiled back at her, but the hate needed to go somewhere and he’d put three bullets into Jurgis, one taking off half his face.”

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Ruby stepped out of the shower and the air conditioning gave her goose bumps. She enjoyed the whole process of getting ready for a working party. Getting showered, then dressed in something clinging and expensive. Last would come the makeup, George had even paid a top makeup artist to teach her a few tricks of the trade. More accurately the shoes would come last, Ruby had a real thing about shoes, especially heels. She’d never worn heels until she was 20, but she’d fallen in love with the extra height and the power they seemed to give when she entered a room. There was a knock on her room door.

“Yes, what is it ?” She shouted.

“He’s arrived.”

“Ok, I’ll be another ten minutes.”

The voice had been Carlos, one of George’s large but discreet security team. She quite liked Carlos, but personal fun would come after she’d done what George was paying her to do. Once she’d put on her shoes Ruby needed a few moments to collect her thought.

Through the window she could see the palms by the pool swaying gently in the breeze. George had used the private island near Pine Key before and Ruby knew the layout well, which was important in making her feel in control. That was important, if the party was going to work, she had to feel confident and in control. She realised it had been twenty minutes since she’d told Carlos she’d be out in ten. No problem though, everything was designed to get her into position, she was the talent. How much had it cost to hire the island ? Ruby didn’t know or care, but she assumed there had been a large investment in time and money to get her close to Carlson. A private island with everything provided by the Polandrous Foundation was certain to please everyone. Just close enough to a major tourist island with its safe international airport, but private enough to make even the most paranoid financier loosen their tongue. Not that Ruby needed them to talk much, just relax.

“Good evening Miss Ruby.”

She nodded to the waiter carrying food from the kitchen area. Everything was in separate buildings, but no one minded the walk from their individual bungalows to the main building. It gave the opportunity to enjoy the views of the sea and the scents of the flowers. Ruby even liked the constant chirruping noise, which one of the maids had told her was made by frogs. Carlos was waiting at the door, simply smiling at her. The previous personal guard had turned into a nagging PA, who tapped his watch and glared at her if she was two minutes late. Carlos was far cooler and she was seriously thinking of sharing her bed with him, but not until she’d obtained the information George needed. She leant into Carlos and kissed his cheek, picking up several thoughts that excited her. He was also carrying a gun, which didn’t.

“Expecting trouble ?” She asked.

“Just being careful.”

Ruby didn’t like guns. There had been the time in Budapest, when things had turned a little awkward. She wasn’t working for George then, but a mobster of indeterminate east European origin. Jurgis had treated her like his personal property and her year with him had been quite stressful.

She'd cried for him after he'd died, but she'd run for the airport and never looked back. It had been the first time anyone had felt her reading their thoughts and the mobster had reacted instinctively, drawing an old Makarov pistol from his belt and aiming it straight at her. She couldn't clearly remember his name, but she remembered the confusion in his head and the hate in his eyes.

"Fucking witch." He'd shouted at her.

She gave him her full blast smile. She'd quickly learned that her gift had a broadcast facility as well as being able to read minds. Ruby looked at him with her dark brown eyes, looking out from under her raven dark curls and gave him complete trust and adoration in a single smile. It worked, it always did. He'd smiled back at her, but the hate needed to go somewhere and he'd put three bullets into Jurģis, one taking off half his face. Since then no one had aimed a gun at her, but Ruby still didn't like guns and probably never would. Carlos followed her along the corridor, it was his job, to keep her safe.

"The party looks to be going well." He said.

She looked straight at him and he didn't flinch, most did, once they realised all their thoughts were open to her.

"And if I pull at my left ear ring?"

"I tell you George needs you urgently."

George was to the left of the room, near the buffet. She walked across to him and briefly touched his hand.

"Circulate Ruby. Give Carlson the full charm offensive." Said George

She liked George Polandrous. Some of the people she'd worked for since discovering her gift were cold fish, treated her like an appliance. Most and not just the men had made it obvious that her duties were to include sharing their bed on demand. Not that Ruby was against a varied sex life, she'd enjoyed mixing with the rich and beautiful and would probably pick a lover for tonight, but it would be her choice. George had been different. He treated her like a favourite niece, even teased her about her love of chocolate covered Brazil nuts. Even George though didn't realise the anguish that the thoughts of others could bring.

At one party there had been a Dutch banker, very well respected and pillar of his local community. The problem was that he had a thing for children, very small children. As Ruby looked into his mind, she was rewarded by a steady stream of his past abuse of children as young as three, all in full colour and stereophonic sound. At another party in Nassau there had been a German property developer who looked like Santa Claus, jolly laugh, flowing white beard. He was selling arms to both sides in a long running spot of trouble in the Middle East. Even the charming HR lady from a well-known London bank had started to picture what she'd like to do to Ruby if given the opportunity, and very little of it was pleasant or legal. Ruby had once thought of giving names and details to the police, anonymously of course, but then George had made her rich, very rich and Ruby had thought 'fuck it' and kept quiet.

She walked towards the Carlson group, him with his minor entourage of office minions. The mental fingers started to go over her body, but she was used to that, almost flattered by it. A close friend had once told her when she was eighteen that she'd be very dangerous by the time she was twenty five. She was now twenty two and could say with certainty that everyone in the Carlson Group wanted her and that gave her power.

"Mr Carlson. I'm Ruby, PA to Mr Polandrous."

It was almost the truth, on the payroll of the foundation she was listed as a PA, but there was a room full of girls to do the typing and filing and God forbid the dictation. Ruby was paid obscene amounts of money purely to rub shoulders with the rich and famous.

“Hi Ruby. I’m looking forward to the whole weekend, did you arrange it ?”

“Only some of it, I had a lot of help”. She lied. George had minions to organise parties.

Carlson started to look awkward, but there was nothing instantly repugnant in his mind. True as a married man with three children perhaps he shouldn’t have been thinking about how she’d look without her little black dress, but at least he wasn’t thinking of strangling her with her own stockings, unlike the HR lady.

“Can I refill that ?”

She brushed his hand as she went to take his glass and felt the awkwardness go away. No magic involved, no use of her gift, physical contact usually had that effect. Ruby liked the simple act of walking away from her target, it gave her an idea of how well she had them on the hook. It wasn’t just physical, she hadn’t found anyone she couldn’t enslave, even if the effect didn’t last very long. Even George, though he refused to admit it.

“Same again for the gentleman Miss ?”

The two people behind the bar were locals, but both seemed very efficient and quickly remembered who was drinking what.

“Yes and I’ll have a glass of lemonade with a touch of bitters.”

It would look like an exotic cocktail, he was even adding a tacky plastic stirrer with an umbrella. But Ruby needed a clear head, at least for now.

“Thank you.” Again she gave him the full smile and felt him melt.

On the way back with the drinks she noticed George being pestered by the wife of the head of a well-known bank. A bank that was going through hard times and was about to ask the government for a bail out. Ruby found a lot of general noise in the woman’s head, but nothing George might find useful.

“I think Carlos was looking for you.”

She saw the look of relief on George’s face as he made his apologies and left. She turned away and tuned out the many and varied fantasies the people around her were having about the beautiful brunette in the tiny black dress, her. Tuning out was vital, letting every thought into her head in the chance of picking up something interesting had nearly driven her crazy. Now she was like a precision instrument. Give the target a key phrase about the intelligence of interest and then grab it and away.

“Sorry I had to rescue George.” She said.

Carlson smiled, pleased that she’d included him in a minor plot with her boss.

Carlson, CEO of Melanic Chemicals, was smiling at her, she had him fairly well hooked and willing to tell her anything. The trick was not to actually get him to say anything of much interest. One of his minions might be recording everything, Carlson might well repent and repeat anything he’d said to his wife, or worse, his board of directors. No, the trick was to put a gentle seed comment into the conversation and see what thoughts it produced.

“How long have you been with George ?” Asked Carlson.

“About two years now.”

Good a question she didn’t have to lie about.

“Where were you before that ?”

Perfect ! Just a small lie and she'd find out the information George wanted and become just another party goer out for some fun.

"I was with a large city brokerage you've probably never heard of. Prendell Brothers."

His mind did a quick flip, but he'd have made a good poker player as the smile didn't falter. He touched her shoulder, which probably meant he was about to lie to her and wanted to reassure her. Only the best behavioural science trainers for George, but the money spent had made her a far more efficient intelligence tool.

"No. I don't know them. Were you with them long ?"

A silly lie, everyone knew his company were using Prendell for their takeover of GKDN, but Carlson was after all a CEO and not a corporate spy. In his mind he was thinking of GKDN and in a fraction of a second the top bid price he'd pay. Now all she had to do was get to her room and transcribe the thoughts onto her laptop before she forgot anything important.

"Several years. Please excuse me, but I think George needs me."

She went to the ladies room and freshened her makeup, but George was hovering outside when she left.

"That was quick," he said, "did you get the information."

George didn't pull and prod, she liked that. Some of her past employers and even some of the people she'd dated had constantly grabbed and pulled at her. George merely walked outside and let her follow. There had been hints of a tropical storm in the area, but the night air was calm and wonderfully warm.

"It's wonderful here," she said, "did I ever tell you about winters in Budapest ? Two months of minus fifteen every night George. When I retire it'll be to somewhere like Pine Key."

"Keep getting the right information and you'll be able to live where you like."

Her official bank account had just a few hundred pounds in it, just the right average amount a twenty two year old PA was likely to have as available funds. Her investment account was held under a false name in a very respectable bank in Bermuda and she'd never quite comes to terms with all the attention that bank lavished on her fake identity. If she really had been a retired realtor from Cincinnati, she might have actually attended one of their property investment seminars.

"I have it all," she said, "top bid price, price he hopes to get the company for, who his backers are. Once I hit the right keyword it all went through his mind like a wave."

George began to gently hum a tune that he believed gave him some protection against her, but of course it didn't.

"Alright, I'll do it." She said.

George no longer pretended to be shocked by her ability to pull things from his mind.

"Thank you Ruby. If it wasn't important I....."

"Why her George, she's deeply unpleasant and low on the food chain ?"

She knew she could only bully George to a certain point. Her gift was very useful, but she needed the protection of an organisation like the Polandrous Foundation. Ruby didn't like to admit to feelings for people, but she knew she was beginning to think of George as a kind of father figure. Which in a way was a pity, her real father had been a total bastard.

"You don't need to see her in private Ruby. Just give her some attention and see how she reacts when you mention the girl's name."

"I didn't think we did freebies for grieving relatives."

"We're getting a fee. Not a huge one, but it'll add a few dollars to your pension pot."

She playfully thumped him on the arm and kissed his cheek.

“Good. I don’t think I could cope with you suddenly getting a conscience.”

Ruby turned to walk away, but she’d made a decision that might have consequences.

“George. Promise me you won’t fire Carlos if I sleep with him.”

She was glad it was quite dark, even with the outside bug lamps going at full blast. She knew George was giving her his sad parent look and she didn’t really want to see that again.

“Not the hired help Ruby. It’s not healthy to get too close to them, you might fall in love or something.”

George added ‘or something’ to the end of quite a few of his remarks about her life. He seemed to feel it gave him a catchall to cover any of her excesses. She laughed as she wandered back to the house.

“I promise not to fall in love George. Just don’t fire this one, ok ?”

“Ok, I won’t”

Love indeed ! Ruby wasn’t sure if it was even possible for her to fall in love. To her, love required the ignoring of a lot of fairly obvious flaws in another person. True a good sex life was good at papering over the cracks in quite otherwise disappointing people. But Ruby had the ability to see deep into her various lovers, see right down to their soul. So far everyone she’d slept with more than half a dozen times had revolted her when she’d looked that deep. Of course she didn’t need to look into their minds, but for some reason she couldn’t resist the urge to delve into their psyche. Love, she’d decided, was an illusion, brought on by good sex and a very thick pair of rose coloured glasses.

“George told me to stay close.”

Carlos seemed to appear out of the shadows. What was he ? Ex-special forces from a country not technically on our side, whatever our side meant these days.

“Thank you,” she said, “despite what George says, I may have to take her outside to get the information.”

Carlos produced a set of night vision glasses that looked like something out of a Bond film. Ruby knew the security team had access to the best tech, but seeing it always gave her a shock.

“I’ll be watching everything Ruby. You’ll be quite safe.”

The party was still in full swing when she walked back into the room. Now she understood why the fairly lowly HR lady had been flown out to join the party. First class air travel of course and then there was the connection by a small local airline. All very expensive and George had said the fee was small. Maybe George Polandrous was developing a few morals and a conscience after all ?

Carlson was smiling at her and waving at her to join his group, but she just smiled back and ignored the invitation. She was tuning just about everything out of her head now. The constant mental undressing and fantasies of others was fun at first, but now she was becoming tired. It was like listening to a radio station that insisted on playing the same few records over and over again.

“Is anyone sitting here ?” She asked.

Ingrid Pearce was the woman’s name and she looked surprised that Ruby was talking to her. Ruby picked up pleasure and excitement from Ingrid and something dark lurking behind the expensive designer glasses.

“No. You’re fed up with being on your feet too ?”

“Yes. I always put on heels and I always regret it.”

Ruby gave a slight wave and a waiter appeared almost instantly. They always did, even in the most expensive and exclusive restaurants. The beautiful brunette who made everyone feel special, she was always first to be seated and served.

“Tell the barman I’ll have my usual and for you ?”

Ingrid had a vodka and tonic. Ruby gave her one of her special smiles and made small talk. No triggers yet, that would come later.

"I've seen you at some of George's other..... recreational weekends." Said Ruby.

"Yes, they are rather fun. I've no idea why I keep getting an invite, I'm just a lowly personnel manager, though my bank refers to us as the HR department these days. I suppose once you get on the list, no one thinks to take you off it."

"I won't say a word to anyone."

How old was Ingrid, fifty, maybe fifty five? Ruby gently felt her way into the mind of the woman sat in front of her and it was a very dark place. Jurgis had known some very dangerous people, he had a few on his payroll. Killers, torturers, people who had quite literally sold out their own families. But Ingrid was a type she'd never come across before, there was no restraint in her mind at all. If Ingrid wanted to do something and she thought it would give her pleasure..... then Ingrid would do it. The only limiter on her actions seemed to be a fear of getting caught.

"What are you drinking. It looks very interesting?"

"Lemonade and Angostura bitters, but don't tell anyone, it'll ruin my image."

They both laughed and Ruby picked up pictures from Ingrid's memory, disturbing pictures. Some minds were like that, you got little detail and nothing in spoken language. All that she was getting from the HR lady were a lot of broken memories. A young girl featured in some, but in others there were men, even pets. Ingrid seemed to enjoy controlling people and animals and then often killing them.

"It's too hot in here, even with the air con," said Ruby, "I think I'll go outside."

There was disappointment now and the image of a stocking being tightened around a throat, her throat. Ruby had dealt with some very strange characters in the last four years and she'd learned to see her own death in the minds of others and remain calm.

"Would you like to come with me? It's very sticky in here."

"Yes I think I will." Replied Ingrid.

Pleasure now in her mind and something else. Not affection, she doubted if Ingrid understood the concept. Lust, yes that was it, the middle aged personnel manager actually wanted to get inside her panties. After she was dead though. Not the nastiest fantasy she'd ever found in a mind, but she found it hard to walk into the darkened garden with her back to Ingrid. Ruby just hoped Carlos was not only watching her, but staying alert.

"The Aloes grow as big as trees here." Said Ingrid.

The garden was a hotchpotch of different types of plants from all over the globe, all living an uneasy coexistence in the half acre of private garden.

"Last time I was here the Bougainvillea were in flower, but we've just missed their best flowering season."

As Ruby walked across the garden she picked up a memory of a girl not unlike herself in appearance, but viewed from behind. Her neck..... yes there was something special to Ingrid about the angle of the girl's neck. She leant forward, as if reaching for a flower, turning her neck at the just the right angle. It was like an explosion of images and emotions going off in her head. The girl had suffered, Lilly had suffered for hours. Forcing herself to keep still as she felt fingers on her neck was almost impossible, but she felt Carlos was there, watching from less than thirty feet away. Ruby turned slowly and smiled at Ingrid.

"Sorry, but you looked as though you might faint." Said Ingrid.

Ruby was feeling nauseous and the flood of images continued, there was so much blood. She wanted to shut it out, but there was one more piece of information she needed. Where was Lilly Hughes buried ? Ruby couldn't control her stomach any longer and the party nibbles and lemonade came out of her mouth in a gush. One plant seemed covered in the hot fluid, some kind of insect running away from the mess.

"I'm sorry, I think the party nibbles disagreed with me."

"You poor dear, perhaps it's an allergy ? Allergies can be nasty."

She had the information she wanted, complete with the smell of fresh blood and the sounds of Lilly dying. Before she could shut her mind off, something else hit Ruby. It wasn't unusual, she'd become used to enjoying the scenes in the minds of others. She never felt guilty, she was just picking up the enjoyment from Ingrid's mind. Something was different now though, she didn't want to shut out the feelings.

"Are you alright Miss ?"

Carlos was there, looking concerned and watching Ingrid intently.

"Yes. It must have been the crab sticks. I always eat too many."

Her mind was shut now, even to Carlos, she needed some mental peace. Ingrid never left her, helping her into the main building and showing what appeared to be genuine concern.

"Are you sure you're going to be ok ? Do you want me to fetch anyone ?"

"No, thank you. I'll be fine."

She ran, through the area where the buffet was laid out and into the servant's quarters, rushing into the men's toilets. There was only one cubicle and luckily it was empty. Ruby knelt on the floor and retched into the toilet bowl. She'd enjoyed it ! It hadn't been some kind of imported thrill from Ingrid, she'd actually enjoyed seeing Lilly die. The door banged and Carlos was in the toilet, leaning against the door to stop her being disturbed.

"Does it always affect you like this ?" He asked.

"I actually thanked that murdering bitch."

Her stomach kept trying to throw out something that wasn't there, but she couldn't stop retching. There was an insistent knocking on the door and the sound of Carlos telling a waiter to find another place to take a leak. For some reason it occurred to Ruby that it was the first time she'd been in a gent's toilet and it smelt rather unpleasant. She got to her feet, pleased that nothing had stuck to the front of her very expensive dress.

"And no, it doesn't always affect me like that."

She didn't want to look into his mind, or anyone else's mind for a very long time, but his body language indicated genuine concern.

"Did you get everything you needed from her ?" He asked

Need ! She almost screamed at him, but realised he'd never understand what getting into the mind of another could do to your own mind, your own sanity.

"Everything, I got it all. Most importantly for her family, I know where her body is."

Ruby always prided herself on her good manners, but she shoved Carlos out of the way and left the toilet.

"I need to get to my room and write all this up."

"What, now ?"

"Yes now !!" She shouted.

She regretted shouting and grabbed his hand, pulling him along after her.

“The sooner I write it down, the more I remember. By morning most of the detail will be gone from my mind, thankfully.”

He was looking at very strangely. Poor Carlos, he’d briefly acted as an enforcer for some kind of Colombian warlord, but she doubted he’d seen the kind of horror poor Lilly had gone through.

“Should I get George ?” He asked.

“That bastard ! No, just come with me.”

He hadn’t told her, that was the most annoying thing. Ingrid had been to at least another three of the Foundation’s get togethers, yet George had never mentioned anything about her being a serial killer. They were in her bungalow and she was getting a fresh pair of panties from a drawer and picking her dressing gown up from the floor.

“There are drinks in the fridge, get me a large scotch and ginger.”

In the bathroom with the door locked and she could get out of her dress and inspect it. No, there were no marks from her vomit or the trip to the men’s room. Fuck ! There was a vomit stain on her precious Blahniks. She threw the shoes against the wall, then she peed, changed her panties and put on her gown. Carlos had poured her a large drink with lots of ice and he was now sat on her bed.

“This won’t take long.” She said.

Ruby wasn’t really into tech, even her Ipod gave her headaches, but the lap top had become her friend. She turned it on and entered the password. How it worked she had no idea, but every document she typed was transferred to George’s laptop. She could type her reports and forget all about the evening.

“What do you think will happen to the HR lady ?” Asked Carlos.

“I have no idea. My guess is that Lilly’s family will have her killed.”

Carlos simply nodded at her, it made sense. Even if Ruby wanted to give evidence to the police, they would hardly believe her story. Knowing where the body was buried would just implicate her and George in the murder. Ruby started the Carlson report, remembering every detail she’d seen in his mind. There were even a few things about his marriage that might be useful. George had once told her.

“Give me too much detail and I can delete it. Give me too little and you might cost me a fortune.”

Three pages she wrote and Carlos was now laid on her bed and looking bored.

“Nearly there, have another drink.”

“Do you want one ?”

“Yes, same again.”

She wanted to start the report on Ingrid with “You bastard,” but Ruby was proud of her professional attitude to what was often an intolerable piece of memory. Four pages she typed straight off, not even using the spell checker. It was all there, the suffering and death of a frightened young girl. Ruby pressed save and then send. She closed the laptop and noticed Carlos was looking at her, an expectant grin on his face. Ruby let the robe drop off her shoulders and walked towards the bed noticing Carlos had left his Glock 17 on the bedside table. Her days in the East had taught her a lot about weapons and there wasn’t a firearm she didn’t feel comfortable handling. She temporarily forgot her hatred of firearms and picked up the gun, turning off the safety and pointing it at his head as she straddled him.

“Do you like to play rough ?” She asked.

He was grinning at her, until she began to gently thrust up and down on the bulge in his trousers. He reached out to touch her breasts.

“Not so soon, perhaps we need to agree a safety word.” She said.

He was laughing now, ignoring the weapon aimed at his forehead and reaching to undo his trousers. "How about Crazy Fucker ?" He asked.

Ruby put the gun back on the table and helped him to undo his trousers, enjoying the feel of his hot dick in her hands. His hands went to her breasts and Ruby moved back, pulling her panties to one side, letting him enter her and enjoying the feel of his dick going deep into her body.

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