

Ruby 2

Chapter 19 – The Facility

“Ruby ran the keycard over the reader and was rewarded with a beep and a few Korean characters on the screen. Sarah came over and looked at the screen.

“Computer says no.” She said.”

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Everything was so much easier now it was just him and three of Ruby’s super beings. Sometimes he thought of them as kids, but then they’d do something jaw dropping. Serge had seen the firefight between Terry’s men and the local police, or at least most of it.

“Stay in the middle of us.” Trudy had told him.

They’d only just climbed out of the orange post office van, gone barely a few feet. What had gone wrong ? Serge wasn’t sure, but parking outside of a major bank had been a silly mistake. The rear doors of the van had been open. Perhaps a local had seen several heavily armed foreigners sat in the back of a Chinese post office van and alerted the police. Perhaps Terry had been too confident about them blending in among the other foreigners in Harbin. There was no way of contacting Terry now and he had to assume that he’d go to ground, taking the mercenaries with him. Trudy had instructed them all on what to do, as they moved invisibly across the street and away from the van.

“Don’t rush.” She’d said. “Walk normally and stick together, no matter what.”

He had no idea if they’d made them all invisible, or if it was a mental effect on anyone close to them. They moved through the pedestrians like ghosts, unseen and ignored. Not that there were many pedestrians on the pavements, once they heard the sound of automatic weapons. The public scattered in all direction, all well away from Serge and his three gifted kids. Later he’d learned that the Chinese authorities had claimed only two police officers had been killed. Serge knew differently, he’d seen Terry’s people using grenades on two police cars. Then Trudy had taken them down a side street and they’d left the battle behind them. Lots of cars coming up the street, most of them police cars.

“Crap !” Said Roger. “Every cop in Harbin seems to be arriving.”

Yet Terry had managed to get most of his people out of that hell, or at least that’s what was being said on the TV news. No one bothered them, as Trudy kept them together until they were a good mile from where they’d climbed out of the orange van. There was no panic now, the battle was far enough away for the public to be acting normally. Trudy had stopped in front of a clothing store and they were all looking at the window display.

“I don’t know how you did that, but thank you.” He said.

“What do we do now ?” Asked Lisa.

They were all waiting for him to come up with a plan. It didn’t need much thought to decide on their initial needs and he had an idea on how to get out of China in comfort. Serge had been in similar situations, in places a lot more dangerous than Harbin.

“Money.” He replied. “And local clothing, we look too conspicuous.”

Not everyone in China was short, the suits in the window of the clothing store looked about his size. Trudy would be a problem of course, but there had to be something to cover her up a bit. Serge nodded at the window.

“Can you do your thing on the shop staff ?”

It was a family business and they were soon honoured guests of the family. Serge was sitting comfortably in their kitchen, enjoying his first home cooked meal in..... a hell of a long time. There was only a husband and wife and an elderly grandmother. All of them had easily been converted into adoring slaves, happily giving Serge their money tin and making sure they were well fed.

"They obviously don't believe in banks." He said.

There was a lot of money in the old biscuit tin, probably everything the family had. Serge took enough for his plan and a little extra as a reserve. The family actually looked sad, that he hadn't taken all of the money and left them in penury.

"Perfect Trudy, where did you find that?" He asked.

Tall thin black girls were rare in China.

"Rarer than dragon's tears." Lisa had once commented.

Trudy had managed to find a large cloak with a hood, which hid most of her features. It wasn't perfect, but coupled with their gifts, it just might work.

"Their stock is a weird mixture of stuff." She answered. "I found this in an upstairs storeroom."

Serge had found a business suit that fitted perfectly. They'd all tried to look smart and respectable, rather than trying to resemble locals. Instead of rather grubby hoodlums, they now looked like neat and tidy tourists.

"I even found some expensive luggage." Said Roger.

"We don't want to bankrupt our new friends." Said Lisa.

Trudy was nodding as she examined the rather dated, but expensive looking nest of cases.

"They are nice." Admitted Lisa.

Serge watched the family's television, while the others ignored any restraint and filled the liberated luggage with spare clothing. There was an item on Terry's battle with the police, including pictures of two dead cops.

"Trudy!" He called. "I can't understand any of this, help!"

She arrived at the end of the item and went through the channels, trying to find the news on another station. There were only a few channels to choose from and most of them didn't start their programming until the evening. Trudy asked the grandmother, whose memory was surprisingly good.

"The police think it was a botched bank robbery." Said Trudy. "Two foreigners were killed and two cops."

"We know that's a lie." Said Lisa. "We saw at least twice that number of dead cops."

"Just hope that Terry survived and they've found somewhere to hide." Said Serge. "We need to make our own plans to get out of China."

They were suddenly all around him, completely quiet. All those super powers and they were relying on him to get them to safety. It was a little scary and humbling.

"Harbin is a major station on the Trans-Siberian Railway." He said. "We can use it to get right through to Vladivostok and link up with Ruby, on her way out of North Korea."

"We might miss her, or she might go another way." Said Roger.

"Then we contact Olga's people and arrange for the necessary paperwork to get home from Russia. I'm sure Olga's friends will have somewhere safe for us to stay."

They liked the plan, three nodding heads. Actually four, the granny was nodding at him too.

"There is one huge problem though." He added.

"Our passports are useless and we have no fake ID Papers to use." Said Trudy.

They were keeping up with him, good. He just hoped they were capable of handling what was required of them.

“How well does your Sunday best smile work ?” He asked. “Could you get us tickets from the station booking office ? Maybe even get us through the inevitable border checks ?”

They talked to each other for a while, even bringing the owners of the store into their conversation. A few sentences were in English, but most of their conversation was carried out in flawless Mandarin. He knew their behaviour well now, they’d only give him an answer when they were pretty sure it was accurate.

“Our new best friends know the trip well, they have suppliers in Vladivostok.” Said Trudy. “The train now terminates at the border, no one knows why. There is a bus though, every day except Sunday.” “I hadn’t thought of using a bus.” Replied Serge. “How long does that take ?”

They exchanged glances, he wasn’t going to like the answer.

“Ten to twelve hours, they advised taking our own food and drink.” Answered Trudy.

“They say the route is very scenic” Added Roger.

Twelve hours on a bus didn’t appeal, but it might actually be easier to get across the border that way.

“We can wait until the ticket office is quiet.” Said Trudy. “Getting tickets without papers won’t be a problem.”

“The border might be a bit more tricky, but it’s doable.” Added Lisa.

In his days with the DGSE, he’d never have entertained such a loose plan. He no longer had access to those kinds of resources though and it seemed their best way out of China.

“Sounds like we’re leaving town on a bus.” He said. “Anything else I should know ?”

“Cheaper than the train.” Said Roger. “The tickets are only five hundred Yuan.”

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As a combat tactic, it lacked subtlety, yet had proven to be very effective. Lau ran across a section of the compound, while Eugenie kept under cover. Lau was fast on his feet, faster than any human. The men guarding the facility were spread out in small groups, keeping themselves well hidden. Lau was too tempting a target though, the guards inevitably tried to take a shot at him. Once they revealed their position, Eugenie shot them, or used a grenade on their bunker. Easy peasy, as Spider would have said, if he hadn’t been safely at home in London.

“It only works if you run fast enough.” She said.

“A little help would be appreciated !”

He was getting grumpy at her now, as if it was her fault. A bullet had taken a large bite out of the calf muscle on his right leg. For most people it would have removed them from the battle, but they weren’t ordinary people. He’d heal quickly, blood loss was the problem.

“Stop the bleeding or you’ll be too weak to run.” She said. “How can you be my lure, if you can’t run ?”

He just glared at her again, before trying to hold the wound closed with his hands. Eugenie sighed and knelt next to him, knocking his hands out of the way.

“You need to learn how to do this Lau.” She said. “I might not always be available to help.”

“But..... I was only carrying out the plan you thought of.”

He had a point. She found the skill in her mind, among her many gifts and gently rubbed her hands over the ugly wound in his leg. It was messy, her hands soon became covered in his blood.

“Stop wriggling !” She said.

“It hurts.”

“Tsk.”

His body would do most of the healing without her help, she just used her healing gift to stop the rapid loss of blood. Satisfied that her lure would live to run again, she stood up.

“There Lau, give that a few minutes to heal and you’ll be good as new.”

She’d dragged him into a thick group of flowering Buddleia bushes, their purple flowers giving almost perfect cover. The colourful bushes were everywhere, an odd landscape for a battle. She carefully parted a few branches to see what was going on.

“Maybe you could be the runner for a while ?” Asked Lau.

She gave him what she hoped was her most derisive laugh. She liked Lau, actually liked him quite a lot. She saw it as her mission in life to change him though, to curb the worst of excesses of his pompous attitude. All for his own good of course.

“No way ! Anyway, I’m a better shot than you.”

She heard him muttering and being rude about her in quite a few languages. Eugenie ignored him, as she looked across the compound. Ruby hadn’t reached the missile facility yet, she was going to let them know before entering the underground bunker. Eugenie found Ruby, still fighting her way through the guards. Sophie too, shining like a bright orange beacon in her mind.

“Where is everyone ?” Asked Lau. “Do we need to move ?”

“Relax for a while, let your wound heal. Ruby is dealing with a group of guards and is a little behind schedule. Charlotte and Sophie are way out near the helicopter landing pad.”

Causing mayhem was their function, drawing the guards and any reinforcements away from Ruby. She felt a little resentful at not being with Ruby, but she hadn’t taken Charlotte either. Just herself and two ordinary humans, an odd choice. Still, Ruby always seemed to know best.

“It’s a bit quiet.” Said Lau.

“Hmmm.”

There was too much vegetation in the way, to see the helicopter clearly. A good half mile away, the large double rotor machine sat on the tarmac landing pad. It wasn’t a military helicopter, but it still carried two defensive machine guns. It was fairly high up on their list of things to destroy.

“I think Sophie is going for the copter.” She said.

“Damn, we wanted to blow that up.”

Gunfire from the direction of the helipad, assault rifles but not the Kalashnikovs they were all using. Something with a higher pitch, probably something made in North Korea. Answering fire and the sound of a grenade being used.

“Tell me what you see Eugenie ?”

“Shush.”

There was a flash of light and a brief trail of orange flame. Sophie and her bazooka, scoring a direct hit on the helicopter. There was a brief whooping noise in her earpiece, as Sophie enjoyed her few seconds of fame.

‘Helicopter destroyed, moving west.’ Said Charlotte.

Transmissions on their super stealthy and encrypted comms system were being kept brief. Ruby had a natural suspicion of all things comms, after finding out that virtually everything could be intercepted. Eugenie helped Lau to his feet, holding the buddleia blooms to one side, so he could see the burning helicopter.

“Another potential threat that we don’t have to worry about.” She said.

“Good for Sophie.” Said Lau. “Come on, we can go north. There are a couple of anti-aircraft guns, barely two hundred yards away.”

Poor Lau, he desperately wanted something to blow up.

“Ok, let’s see how your leg is doing first.”

It was miraculous for a human, but not for them. Eugenie knelt and examined his calf muscle. There was muscle there now, though it had yet to grow proper skin. It looked like a lump of raw meat, skin would grow in a few more minutes. Muscle tone was the problem, that might take a while.

“North it is.” She said. “I think you should shoot and I’ll be the lure though. At least until you fully heal.”

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Sophie was in love with the bazooka, even more in love with it than when she’d seen it standing in the weapon dealer’s warehouse in Vladivostok. She slung it over her back, while keeping low to avoid a return of fire. The guards were angry now, their bullets hitting the branches above her head. She’d once seen it done on TV and it had looked cool. Probably completely ineffective, but she felt in the mood for something cool. She waited for the next burst of fire from the North Korean soldiers and noted the position of the closest. Her earpiece buzzed slightly.

‘Are you alright Sophie ?’ Asked Olga.

‘Yes, just going to try something.’

She lay flat on her back, holding her Kalashnikov high above her, aiming it in the direction of the closest enemy. Sophie fired the weapon, letting it fire a whole clip towards its target. She rolled back onto tummy, fitting a fresh clip as she rolled. Not far away, barely fifty yards, she heard someone yelling for help. A Korean voice, probably a guard, probably a conscript. For a few seconds the voice turned a distant enemy into a real person. Nonsense of course, it was kill or be killed. Olga brought her mind back to the task at hand.

‘Sophie got another one.’ Said Olga.

Olga was firing and moving forward. Sophie shook any regret out of her head and moved forward slowly, firing short bursts through the bushes. Ahead of her was the burning helicopter and heliport ruins. The thick vegetation made seeing any details almost impossible. Olga to her left and still firing at someone. Charlotte was a little to her right and using a grenade to shift an unseen enemy.

‘Got mine.’ Said Olga.

Sophie began to understand the chaos of war. Even with her gifts, she was finding it hard to be certain that her target was a Korean soldier. They could have easily brought death and destruction to the entire compound, but Ruby wanted to avoid killing Kwan and his people. Sophie fired a single round into a bush, hearing someone cry out. She found him, lying face down.

‘Got mine.’ She said, barely recognising her own voice.

Still Kalashnikov fire to her right, Charlotte trying to neutralise her man. Sophie didn’t touch the dead man in front of her, they’d had the course on the dangers of traps. It was him though, the soldier she’d shot twice. There was a lot of fresh blood near him and her senses told her the body was still warm. Sophie ignored her training and common sense, using her foot to turn the body over. A young man, he looked little older than her.

“He looks so young.” She muttered.

“He was, just twenty three and looking forward to his next leave.”

The main thing worrying Sophie, was that the woman had appeared from nowhere. All her gifts she took so much pride in and she still couldn’t sense the woman in her mind. Her eyes saw a young woman in some kind of sarong, but her extra senses saw an empty space. Sophie instinctively raised her weapon, before remembering to tell the others.

‘Have a live local.’ She transmitted. ‘Looks friendly.’

Ruby was replying, saying the woman wasn't to be harmed, just as Olga crashed through the undergrowth. Charlotte the other side, both of them keeping their weapons aimed at the young woman. She didn't seem bothered by their aggressive welcome, smiling at them in a friendly fashion.

"I am Nari, wife of Kwan." She said. "I mean you no harm. I have recently given birth, so I ask you not to make my child an orphan."

No one lowered their weapon and Olga was looking at Charlotte.

"What are you picking up from her?"

"Nothing, nothing at all." Replied Charlotte. "I can see her, but not her mind and she either doesn't have an aura, or she can block my senses."

Sophie liked Nari for some reason and it had nothing to do with auras or super senses. Nari simply felt like a good person, on a purely intuitive level. Sophie lowered her weapon.

"What do you want from us Nari?" She asked.

"Kwan has taken a few volunteers into the facility. They will help Ruby as best they can." Replied Nari. "The rest of our people followed me to the shelter and are quite near here. We need your help to leave this place."

Ruby had asked twice for an update. Olga lowered her weapon and responded to Ruby.

'Looks like we've found all the friendlies. On our way to offer assistance.'

"Well Nari," said Charlotte, "it looks like we're helping you. Please take us to this shelter."

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There were two gun emplacements guarding the entrance to the underground part of the facility and they'd delayed her progress. The North Korean soldiers all looked so young, but they had decent equipment and weapons. Ruby kept low, as another large calibre bullet went over her head.

"I can't budge them Ruby." Said Murad. "I think it's time for a little supernatural help."

They'd already seen the dark clouds building in the direction of the naval base. It was obvious that Baba Yaga was determined to reduce the entire bay to nothing but ruins. Ruby had been holding back though, unwilling to risk harming any of Kwan's people.

"What grenades did you bring?" She asked Murad. "Anything big?"

They left Sarah to fire the occasional round at the Koreans, while Murad took off his pack and dug through the contents.

"Only more of the same I've already used." He replied. "Their defences are just too good."

"What are those?" She asked.

He had two large canisters in his pack. Long and bulky, they looked perfect for the idea that she'd been wanting to try.

"They're just tear gas."

"I have an idea that just might work." Said Ruby. "Keep them busy while I try something."

Once Murad would have put his head at a slight angle and given her the look. The is this woman crazy look. Now he trusted her and helped Sarah in keeping the North Koreans busy.

Ruby held one of the canisters, feeling its contents and harmlessly removing them. She had no idea where she'd sent them to, but she now had an empty tear gas grenade. In to it she put her gift, the energy she could pull from just about everything in the world. Lowering the ambient temperature just a degree or so, barely enough to register if she took her power from a wide enough area. Ruby wound the energy up and carefully placed it within the confines of the metal canister.

"Damn!" She said. "Not sure if I can keep it in there for long."

They had no idea what she was talking about. Murad and Sarah were just giving her blank looks.

“Get down !” Yelled Ruby.

She threw the canister up, using her strength first and then her mind. Ruby held it, lovingly pushing the canister high over the enemy defences. Her blessing of fire and destruction, allowed to drop where she hoped it would destroy the gun emplacement. Damn, it had landed a little short, right in front of the concrete and sand bag defences. She put her head down just in time, the explosion was far bigger than even she had estimated.

“I think that got the job done.” Said Murad.

They were all covered in dust and debris. Sarah had obviously taken in a mouthful and was coughing and spluttering. Ruby made sure her friend wasn’t seriously injured, before finding out how much damage she’d caused.

“That was a bit too much.” She said.

A few sandbags were still there, but the concrete base and the heavy calibre gun were gone. Probably turned into metal fragments and concrete dust. There was no sign at all of the soldiers who’d been firing at them. Dust covered everything, it was still in the air, refusing to settle.

“Christ Ruby !” Said Sarah.

“I know, the next one will be a smaller bang.”

“Actually I quite like the effect.” Said Murad.

They’d all been listening to the occasional burst of chatter on their comms systems. It was at that moment, that Sophie gave them the news Ruby had been hoping to hear.

‘Have a live local.’ Sophie transmitted. ‘Looks friendly.’

There was an infuriating few minutes, where everyone seemed too busy to give her any more information. Eventually Charlotte transmitted that they were on their way to help Kwan’s people, all Kwan’s people.

“How many do you think there are ?” Asked Sarah.

“I’m not sure, but Kurt mentioned two hundred or so in one of his notes.”

How to get two hundred people quietly and safely out of North Korea ? It was a nice problem to have, but it was a problem that would have to wait. Ruby held up the second tear gas grenade.

“Right, gun emplacement number two.” She said.

“I don’t think you need to bother.” Said Sarah. “Look ! They’re running away.”

Two soldiers who’d seen what Ruby had done to the a gun emplacement just like theirs. They were climbing over the sandbags and running into the undergrowth. Ruby used her mind to look over the area and found no further enemy soldiers. No one hiding in a tree, no snipers in the undergrowth or behind a wall. The destruction was all theirs, they’d routed the guards.

“The doors are open.” Said Murad.

The concrete walls were covered in marks and holes, where bullets and then Ruby had done their damage. Three soldiers had tried to escape into the facility, their bodies still just inside the doors. Heavy metal doors that needed a key and a door code. The dead soldiers had given Ruby back the time she’d lost.

“So far, I’m not impressed with the guards.” Said Murad.

“They all look so young.” Added Sarah.

One still had a keycard in his lifeless hand and a bunch of keys hanging from his belt. Ruby didn’t know how their ranks worked, but the man with the keys had three stars on his sleeve. He might well have been of senior rank, yet looked barely older than twenty four or five. She put the keycard and bunch of keys into her jacket pocket.

"I think these soldiers are just here to watch Kwan and his people." She said. "Really just put here to show him who's boss. The real defence was supposed to be provided by the nearby naval base, which Baba Yaga has taken care of."

"We owe her a lot." Said Sarah.

Another open set of wide metal doors, with a wide corridor sloping gently down. The lights were still on, but Ruby stopped to get a flashlight out of her pack, just in case. The others copied her as they descended a good forty feet below the surface.

"There are lots of scuff marks on the tiles." Said Murad. "They must bring heavy equipment along this corridor."

"It's probably the only entry point big enough." Said Ruby. "Keep your eyes open for any emergency exits, in case we need to leave in a hurry."

A long straight and level section of hallway, still showing signs of heavy equipment scratching the floor tiles and rubbing against the walls. Eventually they came to a set of heavy metal doors, with a red flashing light above them. They were locked, just a tiny porthole of glass to look through. Ruby peered through the glass at a workshop of some kind.

"They don't seem to believe in signs." Said Sarah.

"I guess if you belong here, you know what's behind the door." Said Ruby. "Let's see if the dead guy upstairs had clearance to get in there."

Ruby ran the keycard over the reader and was rewarded with a beep and a few Korean characters on the screen. Sarah came over and looked at the screen.

"Computer says no." She said.

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There are several inherent problems with spy satellites, other than the massive cost to get them into space. A stationery earth orbit is too high to see anything and low orbits run the risk of becoming decaying orbits. A decaying orbit inevitably means a multimillion dollar satellite becoming the; 'What was the green flash over Portland?' item on the late news.

Few countries will give a number for how many spy satellites they have, though it is a game that only rich countries can afford. Some are designated as weather satellites, navigation satellites, or even up there to keep an eye on climate change, satellites. As Ruby stood in front of the three inch thick, titanium alloy doors; a surprising number of weather satellites swung into position over North Korea. The American satellite had a NASA designation and was officially involved in monitoring global warming. Not that any significant foreign power believed that of course, but it helped to get the funding through various senate committees. In truth Geo-Sat 1257 was a clever spy satellite, which could use any one of its hundred or so sensors, to look at just about anywhere on earth. Once it was given a target, its own AI could decide on the best method to collect and analyse data. Moving to a different orbit brought risks to the one billion dollar satellite, but not a huge risk. High orbit meant plenty of time to correct any problem and Geo-Sat 1257 was extremely unlikely to fall to earth. The on-board AI never saw Baba Yaga, it wasn't looking out to sea. It didn't even take any notice of Sophie and the explosions caused by her much loved bazooka.

What did excite it, or at least get a response from its neural net, were the violent changes in the upper atmosphere. Impossibly large changes, brought about by some kind of intervention in the normal weather patterns. Impossible of course, no such technology existed. Computers don't care if something is impossible or not, they just deal with observable data. The data was compressed and sent as a burst to another NASA satellite and then another, until a relay satellite sent it to a CIA ground station in West Virginia.

“Tell 1257 to have another look. The Brits might have something going on down there.”

The man monitoring the row of screens was poorly paid and bored, but he wasn't stupid. No complaining, no asking silly questions, he needed the paycheque. He sent a coded request to 1257, asking it to slow down a little and take a longer look at the East Sea Naval Base. Everything was a request, the satellite might easily ignore anything that looked risky. It was brighter than most of its handlers and worth a lot more money to the CIA.

1257 saw her on the second look, used a long HD lens to record Baba Yaga. She was hovering over the ruins of the naval base, still wielding lightning as a weapon. It recorded her, the amount of energy contained in each lightning bolt and the general disturbance to the surrounding weather systems. The satellite sent all the information to the CIA station, high in the mountains of West Virginia. It wasn't long before a lot of very excited people, were trying to contact Sir Edwin Fox.

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It was somewhere between three and four am in London, Spider's bedside clock had been playing up. Mary Dwyer was nibbling at his shoulder, which he quite liked. They hadn't woken to engage in early morning sex, their enjoyment of each other had been going on for hours.

“A holiday is what we need.” Said Mary. “Somewhere hot, with miles of empty, sun soaked beaches.”

He had no idea how she'd explain two weeks in the sun to her husband. Spider had no idea how she'd managed to wangle an entire night in his bed. He didn't want to ask her, in case she burst his bubble of happiness.

“I am still deeply in love with my husband.”

She'd told him, quite early on in their relationship, or affair, or whatever they were having. He didn't want to hear her say that again, so he wasn't giving Mary the opportunity.

“I went to Gambia once.” He said. “Every day was sunny and the beach was clean.”

“Or the Maldives. Helen loves the Maldives.”

Helen was her best friend and self-appointed adviser on just about everything. He'd never met Helen, but felt he knew her very well. Spider remembered his trip across half the globe, helping Ruby to reach the far side of the Caspian Sea.

“I wouldn't mind going to Baku again.” He said. “Good hotels and restaurants. They even have all these fake London taxis to take you around.”

“Oh yes, I remember you talking about going there once. Off the beaten track Spider, I like that.”

He was happy, completely and totally happy. The tin was fairly full, enough cash to keep everyone in groceries and takeaway meals for quite some time. The collection work was becoming a good little earner and Mary had finally spent an entire night in his bed.

“Baku sounds good.” Said Mary. “I'll Google it tomorrow.”

She'd find the bad stuff as well as the good, but he didn't think it would put her off. She was drifting off to sleep, snuggling up close, her breathing slowing down.

“I love you.” He said.

“Hmm love you too.”

That completed his happiness. There was still a husband out there somewhere, but Mary had used the 'L' word and she was even sober when she'd said it. He watched her for a while, before falling into a long and untroubled sleep.

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Sarah sat on the grubby tiled floor and watched Ruby examining the solid looking metal doors. Murad was still standing, still alert and looking back the way they'd come.

“Remember a number for me Sarah.” Said Ruby. “1668. It’s important.”

“Fine. Can you open it ?”

Ruby ignored her for a while, as she stopped looking at the sides of the door and concentrated on the lock itself.

“I could probably generate enough energy to force it open.” Replied Ruby. “That would send doors, locks and a good chunk of the concrete wall, hurtling into the workshop.”

Sarah was bored, she hadn’t expected to have to sit for so long. Weren’t they fighting a battle ?

“Is that a bad thing ?” She asked. “I mean, it’s not our workshop.”

She grinned at Ruby and received a grin in reply.

“Normally I’d just bust it in, but we don’t know what Kwan and his people might be building.” Said Ruby. “Supposing it’s a bio-weapon of some kind, or a nerve toxin.”

“I can see how that would be bad.”

It seemed as though she’d been sat there for hours, though she knew it was probably only a few minutes. Ruby suddenly straightened up, obviously a decision had been made.

“What was that number ?”

“1668.” She replied.

“Good, that’s the melting point of titanium. I’m going to melt a hole in the door, just big enough for us to get through.”

“Wow !”

Sarah liked the sound of that, it meant they’d be finally moving again. She did move a little further along the hallway though, just to be safe.

“It’s the only way.” Said Ruby. “I didn’t want to risk setting off a fire protection system, which might lock all internal doors. There is no choice though.”

Sarah moved even further back, before sitting in the middle of the hallway. She drew her knees up, resting her chin on them. Murad put his assault rifle over his shoulder and sat next to her.

“Hell of a day huh !” She said to him.

“She’s amazing ! Have you seen her do this before ?”

“No. Like the gas canister bomb, I think this is a new idea Ruby’s testing out.”

Ruby left her jacket and pack a good distance from the door, before touching the polished titanium with her right index finger. There were no klaxons, no sign the automatic systems had picked up the extreme heat. Sarah felt it though and shuffled her backside even further back along the hallway.

The intense light made her look away, as Ruby seemed to bring a miniature sun into the hallway.

“Don’t look.” She told Murad. “The light might damage your eyes.”

Sarah kept her face against her knees, until the intense light faded away to nothing. She looked up just in time to see Ruby push over a glowing rectangle of metal. It made a loud clang as it fell into the workshop on the other side of the door. They had their doorway and could proceed further into the facility.

“No time to let it cool down completely.” Said Ruby. “We’ll give it a minute or so and then run through.”

“Ruby your clothes.”

Her best friend looked happy and there wasn’t a mark on her skin. Even her wonderful dark raven coloured hair was perfect. Her clothes had been reduced to burnt rags though, a few tattered pieces still clinging to her body. Murad turned and looked the other way.

“Crap ! I’m naked !”

“Good job I always pack a few spare bits of clothing.”

The metal cooled as Ruby dressed in Sarah's emergency clothes. GAP clothing, it was easy to scrunch up to fill the gaps between weapons and grenades. Sarah was a little thinner than Ruby, but it all fitted well enough in the places that mattered.

"Remind me to strip off, if I need to use that trick again. Come on, we need to get moving."

Sarah followed Ruby, Murad behind her. They ran through the hole in the door, avoiding any contact with the hot metal. Once inside they all stood for a while, looking at a vast workshop. There were lathes, furnaces and many other pieces of machinery that she recognised. There were also other pieces of gleaming equipment that looked strange and alien.

"This is amazing, what does it all do?" She asked.

"I have no idea." Replied Ruby. "Don't touch anything! Come on, we need to keep moving."

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