

## Ruby V : Machu Picchu

### Chapter 15 – Last Resting Place

**“Lily’s plan sounded childishly simple and he hadn’t reached an age where he knew simple plans were usually the best. Simple plans often worked, whereas complex plans tended to get everyone killed.**

**“Begin when you’re ready.” Lily whispered.”**

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There hadn’t been three of the Colonel’s people; there had been five with him. They hadn’t had just a car waiting not far away from Alessia House; they’d had a four door saloon car and a Jeep. Lorenzo had missed the extra men until a blanket had been thrown over his head. Two or three solid punches to his guts and Lorenzo had been left with no spare breath to shout out. He’d had trouble breathing, as they’d bundled him into the back of their Jeep. Blankets tend to move about and folds tend to form. By the time they’d pulled away, Lorenzo knew the sort of vehicle he was in. Someone hit him across the shoulder with something blunt, hard and heavy.

“Behave kid and you won’t be hurt.....Do you understand ?”

“Yes.” just one word and he’d had trouble saying it.

The next few minutes were all about getting enough air, while covered in a heavy blanket. All the men had American accents and they weren’t being careful about what they said. Not hurting him was probably a lie to keep him quiet. Lorenzo had no doubt that he’d be dead in a ditch by the end of the day, or tied up and thrown into a river. Once he could breathe without it being a struggle, he shifted onto his back. Every time the Jeep braked, he’d been pushed against something hard, probably a metal box. Moving earned him a kick in the ribs.

“Keep still kid.....I won’t warn you again.”

“Easy Mitch, the kid needs to be in once piece.” Someone said. “The Colonel wants to interrogate him tonight.”

Mitch was just one name associated with a deep voice, but it was a start. Lorenzo hoped to pick up a few more names before Eugenie rescued him. She’d be out there, following them, he was certain of it.

“We should have gone back for the girl.” Someone muttered.

“This one got in the way. There were no orders about her.....Now shut up.” Said Mitch.

So, Lorenzo was just ‘this one’ to them, they didn’t even appear to know his name. That was good, the more confusion about Eugenie and him, the better. Meanwhile the cult members were being careless, with a guy in the front of the Jeep saying they were heading for a motel in the city of Chilca, about forty kilometres away. There was even talk of using the coast road. Lorenzo didn’t think the Colonel’s people were stupid, just thrown out of focus by two new unknown pieces in the game. No wonder the Colonel wanted to interrogate him, personally.

“Slow down, the last thing we need is being stopped for speeding.” Someone said.

“Yeah.....We’ll stop for a meal in Chilca.” Said Mitch. “Any volunteers to babysit the kid ?”

They never did get to Chilca, at least not in those vehicles and not all of them. It happened on the coast road; Lorenzo could smell the sea and hear the occasional call of sea birds. No warning, but he never had been good at receiving thoughts from Eugenie. Actually he’d been worse than useless

when she'd tried to teach him. He'd imagined hearing her sometimes and hadn't heard her genuine telepathic instructions. So, he hadn't been expecting a warning.

"Christ !.....The car went over." Yelled the driver of the Jeep.

"What do you mean went over ?" Asked Mitch.

"Off the road in the direction of the sea.....Look, it's on its side."

Dark out, there had been no daylight coming through the blanket since leaving Lima. The Jeep swerved off the road, coming to a halt after doing a few quick changes of direction.

"Check the car.....I'll deal with the kid." Yelled Mitch.

Deal with had an ominous feel to it, but as far as they knew, the car on its side had nothing to do with their hostage, or whatever they considered him to be. Mitch wasn't even worried about him being under the blanket, as Lorenzo was pulled from the back of the Jeep.

"Leave the fucking blanket, Phil." Yelled Mitch. "It's night and our friend here isn't going anywhere."

A large handgun was jammed up against Lorenzo's left temple.

"Try to run and you're dead." Said Mitch. "Annoy me and I'll kill you twice, just for the hell of it."

The arrival of armed men and a car on its side, hadn't gone unseen by those enjoying a day of sun, sea and sand. No panic and screaming, though most were packing up and heading away. North south, grabbing their children and going anywhere else other than being where the men with guns were looking at a car on its side.

"The cops will be here soon." Said Mitch. "See if anyone survived in the Merc."

Judging by the shaking heads, no one had. There was no mention of the Colonel, though Lorenzo had definitely seen him with the cult members. The Colonel was beginning to seem like one of those leaders, the ones clever enough to get away at just the right moment. He'd gain a reputation for surviving anything, if he survived long enough. Charles de Gaulle had been like that, he'd been a hero to Lorenzo's father. An almost unbelievable thirty one assassination attempts and he'd walked away from all of them.

"We need a vehicle, something large enough to hold all of us." Said Mitch.

It was an order to steal a car and there were quite a few parked on the edge of the sands. One of the cult members began yelling at a family in a large SUV. They'd probably had a barbecue on the beach and were about to go home. He was waving his gun in the direction of a toddler, while shouting at the guy who was probably her father. He wanted the keys to the vehicle and the threat wasn't even slightly ambiguous. Keys or your young girl child dies.

"Hurry it up." Yelled Mitch.

Lorenzo knew Eugenie was there, he recognised her party piece of rolling the car. Just one among many on the sands though, if he couldn't spot her, the Colonel's guys didn't stand a chance. As the man waving the gun at a kid threatened to shoot, he was crushed down to the size of a toaster oven, or a decent size microwave. Crushing had become a party piece of Ruby's; she'd squash things at a pizza and wine night. Seeing a bag of garbage crushed down to the size of an egg was one thing, but people.....Blood vessels literally exploded and pieces of bone became shrapnel. The Colonel's guys were veterans; they must have seen a lot of action. That didn't stop one of them screaming as his friend became a huge bloodstain on the sand. They were actually crouching, as if there was a sniper out there, capable of such a horror. Guns were being waved around.

"Was that you ?"

The man who'd been driving the Jeep, Lorenzo hadn't heard his name. He looked scared and he was pointing a gun in his direction.

"Leave the kid alone." Shouted Mitch. "The Colonel wants to talk to him."

"It was him; it had to be him.....Or one of his friends."

"How would I do that ?" Asked Lorenzo.

"I told you, don't hurt the kid." Yelled Mitch.

The Jeep driver raised his gun and Eugenie had obviously decided he had to go. No crushing this time, the cult member became a ball of white hot flames. There was a little screaming, but he had to have died very quickly. The flames vanished as quickly as they'd appeared and there was just a pile of smoking body parts on the ground. That was new; Lorenzo had never seen anything like that before. Eugenie seemed to be developing her fire skills. Another of the cultists became a pinnacle of flames, which left just Mitch. He was no fool; he didn't point his gun anywhere near Lorenzo.

"I was warned you people knew some sort of voodoo crap." Said Mitch. "Was that you kid ? Did you kill all my guys ?"

Lorenzo lifted his head and nodded, indicating the sands behind Mitch.

"No.....It was her." He said.

As Mitch turned, Eugenie did something with her fingers. She flicked them at Mitch's head, who reacted as though he'd been hit by a hammer. Down he went onto his back. The large man hit the sand so hard that he caused a cloud of dry sand and dust.

"Is he dead ?" Asked Lorenzo.

"I hope not, Ruby will want to talk to him." Said Eugenie.

She put her face next to Mitch's and declared him to be alive.

"I knew you'd come for me." Said Lorenzo.

"Hugs and pizza later, the cops will be on their way. Do you have duct tape on you ?"

"No."

Eugenie pulled a roll from her pocket and threw it to him.

"Duct tape his wrist and ankles." Said Eugenie. "Then duct tape his wrists to his ankles. I'll get their Jeep; it will be perfect for just the two of us. I stole a motorbike to get here, which can stay where I left it. Oh.....And duct tape his mouth."

The sands were deserted, though most seemed to have left their cars and SUVs behind. Probably fleeing burning men and crazy guys waving guns around. The two men Eugenie had turned into balls of flame, were still smouldering. Lorenzo had Mitch tightly bound, when Eugenie arrived with the Jeep. She tossed Mitch in the back, the way most people throw around a bag of sugar.

"Get in; we're going to pick up our hired car." Said Eugenie. "Every cop in Peru will soon be looking for this Jeep, but it'll do to get back to Alessia House."

Lorenzo must have winced a little, as he climbed into the passenger seat.

"Are you alright, Lol ? Are you injured ?"

"Just a few bruises."

"Bastards." Muttered Eugenie.

It was night; they might not have found the trip as easy in daylight. A convoy of police vehicles with flashing lights and blaring sirens, passed them a mile or two back along the coast road. It was doubtful that they'd realised the headlights going the other way were a Jeep. More cops twenty minutes later, who once again, showed no interest in them. Burning men on a beach probably meant a call out for every spare cop in the area.

"Get some sleep if you can." Said Eugenie. "We need to get this guy to Ruby. They're planning an attack on the dig site; it was in all their minds. Losing so many guys might slow the Colonel down, but it isn't likely to stop him. We're going to be on the road until we get to Ruby."

"This one is called Mitch." Said Lorenzo. "I think he's quite high up in the cult."

"I don't care, he can still travel in the trunk of our car.....And the guns of course. Nice of them to supply a little firepower."

"What guns ?" He asked.

"In the back."

It was the box that had been jammed against his face for a while. Hard edges and heavy, it had left him with a few bruises. Eugenie had broken it open, to reveal two assault rifles and a lot of ammunition.

"Wow, they look impressive." He said. "What are they, AR16s ?"

"I have no idea, but they look as though they'll get the job done." Said Eugenie. "I meant it.....Get some sleep. I can't drive all the way there."

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Night at the dig site, though Cal wasn't feeling sleepy. Matilda had been sent to help her build cages for small mammals, which would probably be mostly Vizcacha. Matilda was twenty two and from Austria, though her English was perfect. A bit of an accent, though nothing that got in the way of understanding her. Given the usual universal love of shortening names, everyone knew the girl as Tilda. No using her gifts or doing anything Tilda might think strange. As far as Ellie's students were concerned, Ruby's group were just ordinary humans. Eccentric maybe and a bit spoiled, but otherwise, ordinary. After they'd stopped building cages, Tilda had suggested wine and a movie on her portable media player. Cal suspected Tilda was trying to make a new friend. There'd be a nosey agenda too of course, finding out about the new arrivals.

"Not bad and better than listening to the radio all night." Said Cal. "To be honest though, Aliens needs a big screen to enjoy it properly."

"Money Cal, we only got proper accommodation thanks to Ruby's generous donation." Said Tilda.

"Yeah, Mars told me about the latrine trench."

"Ewwwww, I still shudder." Said Tilda.

Cal dug through the dig's collection of DVDs, which was quite large, but old. Mainly modern horror and Sci-Fi classics, the usual student favourites. One or two romances, but mainly teen screams and creatures from another planet kind of thing.

"I've never seen the original Scream movie." Said Cal. "Shall we watch that next ?"

"Oh yes, Neve Campbell at her best. I need a pee first though."

They were still in what Cal thought of as her canvas research lab, which everyone else called her large tent. Tilda went outside and as it was quite a trudge to the toilets, Cal suspected her new buddy would pee somewhere in the bushes. Tilda returned quite quickly.

"Spike and Sarah are working late." Said Tilda. "They're still using a large lighting array over at the far side of camp."

"Spider, not Spike."

"Sorry."

Cal had been there when Sarah and Spider had volunteered to search for the mysterious tomb of someone who might, or might not, be famous. Volunteering was one thing, but digging in the ground past the usual food and wine time.....

"Shall we go and be nosey ? See what they're up to ?" Asked Cal.

"Should we ? Spider looks a bit.....Angry most of the time."

"Ruby claims his best Sunday smile once made an old lady faint." Said Cal. "He's alright though, once you get to know him. Well.....Are you up for it ? A bit of nosiness ?"

"As long as you think it's alright."

“Come on Tilda, I can see you’re badly in need of toughening up.” Said Cal.

Flashlights, rechargeable flashlights were one of the extras Ellie had bought with a little of Ruby’s donations. Everyone had one, with one battery in the light, while another was on charge. Cal had one and Tilda said the flashlights had transformed life in the dig site.

“Not every hole in the ground is marked.” Tilda had told her. “And....We are in a wood, with all sorts of debris that becomes a hazard at night. One student had to go home, after damaging an ankle joint in the dark. We had battery lights, but.....Often there were no batteries.”

It sounded dreadful and Cal was just glad that with just a press of a button, the area in front of her, was brightly lit. Tilda was right; there was a bright area of light at the far side of what the students called the camp.

“We’ll need to be careful; they’re the other side of where we’ve been digging test pits.” Said Tilda. Cal reacted to Constanze wanting to be picked up, before realising the large cat should have still been in Alessia House. Ruby had arranged for her to be looked after, though Constanze seemed to have her own idea. Cal picked her up and the ancient feline began to purr.

“You little monster, what do you want ?” Cal muttered.

“You have a cat.....I didn’t realise you had a cat.” Said Tilda.

“Constanze.....Yes, she goes everywhere with me.”

“I thought cats just.....You know, wandered off.” Said Tilda.

“Not my Constanze, she’s a good cat.”

Cal adjusted her hold on the flashlight, to get a good hold on the purring cat. Constanze was a gift from Baba Yaga and Cal realised she was going to have to get used to the ancient cat, following her around the world. How she did it ? Not even Ruby seemed to know the answer to that. Constanze was busy with her tongue, running it over her cheek.

“Yeah.....I missed you too.” Cal muttered.

Tilda wasn’t going to forget about Constanze being there, Cal could tell by the way she was looking at the large grey cat. Cal was going to be not just the strange girl in a tent all day; she was going to become the cat lady in the tent all day.

“Watch out for test pits.” Said Tilda.

Cal followed her through the wood, which was full of strange noises at night. Creatures, who hid themselves away during the day, came out at night to hunt and forage. Everything fled from their approaching lights. It didn’t take them long to find Spider and Sarah.

“Wow, you guys look busy.” Said Cal.

Spider was using a pick axe, while Sarah shovelled up the debris. Both of them looked hot, tired and extremely grubby. They appeared to have broken through the hard ground and into the interior of a small building.

“Ahhh, so Constanze followed you again.” Said Sarah.

No real harm done, a fairly harmless comment. Cal still nodded in the direction of Tilda. Living among Ellie’s students was going to be awkward. Ruby should have given them all a talk on living next to muggles. Cal decided she’d mention it to her in the morning. Cal hugged her cat and carefully stepped into where Spider had been swinging the pick.

“So.....Found anything ?” She asked. “You seem to be here very late.”

“Look.....Look at the marks on this wall, Cal.” Said Sarah.

Something in her mind had switched on; Cal could now read the runes perfectly. There were carvings into the stones which weren’t really runes. She knew them though; she’d seen them in other places and on several artefacts. She prodded her finger at the symbol.

"This.....I know this." Said Cal.

"So do I." Said Sarah. "It's why we're here, digging like fury when we're both hungry and tired."

"What is it, what does it mean?" Asked Tilda.

Cal carried the Fractalis everywhere. It had brought her from London in an instant and was her way back there. A strange device, though she remembered seeing the symbol etched into the metal. She aimed the flashlight at the metal, which had the soft yellow colour of gold.

"Here.....See." She said. "It's on so many things Kallina had and some of Ruby's. It means Karakum in a language so old.....It predates just about every other language."

"Let me see." Said Tilda, as she looked at the Fractalis Cal was holding.

"Amazing, did it once have a purpose?" Asked Tilda.

"We think it was purely decorative." Said Sarah.

Tilda was going to insist Ellie was shown the ancient technology. Cal could see it in her mind without really trying. Then there'd be other questions and eventually, Ruby would stop telling Ellie anything at all. It was inevitable and as Ruby was now financing the dig, it needn't be a deal breaker.

Constanze was fussing about in her arms.

"I can see other Baba Yaga runes." Said Cal. "They're leading to somewhere."

"Why is Karakum important?" Asked Tilda. "Please.....Will someone explain that to me?"

"Perhaps, but not now." Said Cal. "Spider.....We have need of your pick."

The cat was leading her, in a way. Constanze fussed about and was becoming quite agitated about a certain direction. Cal knew why, though she couldn't have explained how she knew. Cats had no language, though Constanze probably had more consciousness than the average street moggy. Cal walked to the far end of the ruined building and pointed at a wall.

"Here, the tomb is in here." She said. "Not deep, just two layers of bricks."

"Alright.....Step back, Cal." Said Spider.

"No, you can't destroy the wall." Said Tilda. "It will be thousands of years old and no one has photographed the runes. We're not vandals."

"The tomb is beyond that wall, I know it." Said Cal.

Actually Constanze knew it, though saying that might be counterproductive. Cal was picking up an image of a tomb from the cat in her arms.

"Do it, Spider. Take the wall down." Said Sarah.

"No, that wall is history." Yelled Tilda. "I'll go and wake up the professor if I have to. You must not break apart that wall. It needs to be thoroughly examined and the runes photographed."

"Go; wake her up if you like." Said Spider. "Tell Ellie that the new people want to give her the tomb she's been looking for."

Spider used the pick and although Tilda didn't look happy, she didn't run to fetch the professor. It took him quite a few hits to loosen a couple of bricks. Sarah helped him then, to pull them out of the wall.

"It's dark in there, I need a light." Said Spider.

Cal put Constanze down, she couldn't see her running off, she had moved herself all the way from Alessia House. Cal gave her flashlight to Spider.

"There's a sarcophagus in there an open tomb." Said Spider.

Work became frantic, even Tilda started to carry away the rubble Spider was creating with the pick. It took a while, the rest of the camp were probably asleep, when there was a wide enough hole in the wall to enter the tomb. A few steps down and it was quite clean in there and the air was fresh.

Not a large room, the walls were covered in runes, hieroglyphs and even pictures. One wall was one huge picture of Baba Yaga, hovering in a wood.

"No more waiting.....I'm going to wake up Professor Nicholas." Said Tilda.

As if expecting to be stopped, Tilda ran from the tomb. There was a marble lid for the Sarcophagus, which didn't look to have ever been put in place. There it was, an empty tomb prepared for the deathless witch.

"I understand now." Said Cal. "The deathless one had to die one day and pass on her gifts. This place was prepared for that day. This is where we need to leave Baba Yaga's ashes."

"The professor won't like the tomb being sealed up again." Spider.

"Cal.....Go and wake up Ruby." Said Sarah. "Tell her we need her."

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Up against at least three armed guys, with probably more patrolling the ridge. Thio was terrified; he'd have needed to be insane not be feeling scared to the point of panicking. Lily had a manner about her though and he trusted her. She had been trained by MI6 after all and the TV always showed them as the clever spies, a bit like the British SAS, but less violent.

"Alright Thio, this is what we're going to do." Lily whispered.

He was armed, though he wouldn't have over stated the odds of him actually hitting anyone. Lily was the one with all the training. Her plan involved him making a lot of noise and waving his gun about, while she took care of the actual killing part. It had to be done, he knew that, but he had to ask.

"Do we have to kill them?"

"Yes, or they'll assuredly kill us." Lily had mumbled.

Lily's plan sounded childishly simple and he hadn't reached an age where he knew simple plans were usually the best. Simple plans often worked, whereas complex plans tended to get everyone killed.

"Begin when you're ready." Lily whispered.

He was never going to be completely ready, but he watched the man closest to the hunting rifle and moved when he closed his eyes. Probably boredom rather than taking a nap, but it showed the guy wasn't concentrating on the job at hand. Thio leapt up and ran at the man, firing his gun three times. By some miracle he hit him; there was a flash of blood from the man's throat. It was such a relief to have done what had been asked of him.

"Yeah.....Don't like that, do you." Thio yelled.

Thio turned to find a large revolver being aimed at his face, from not very far away. Life seemed so unfair, he'd done as Lily had asked and now it looked like he was going to die.

"Keep moving, be a difficult target." Lily had told him. "Even good shots hate a fidgety target....So be a fidgety target."

Thio did a quick step to his left and the bullet meant for his head, became a sound like thunder going past his ear. Thio kept moving and realised he'd broken Lily's number one rule.

"You have to know where everyone is, all of the time." She'd said.

"What if I can't remember?"

"Then you'll die."

Fuck he didn't have a clue where anyone was, he was going to die. Panic made his heart race and made him stumble, and another bullet missed him. He came straight at the enemy by chance and fired. Luck wasn't with him and the enemy was firing back.

"Head shots are a certain kill, but body shots tend to hit the guy more reliably." Lily had told him.

Thio kept fidgeting by moving left, then jumping to the right. He heard bullets hitting the trees, or hitting something near him. Thio didn't care what the guy was hitting, as long as it wasn't him. Thio fired four shots from fairly close range, straight at the guy's chest. One worked; there was an eruption of blood near the left side of the man's rib cage.

"Got you fucker !" Thio yelled

Something struck Thio's left arm, as though someone had thrown a stone at him. Part of him knew he'd been shot by the third man, but he couldn't afford to fully allow the idea into his mind. Being shot meant panicking and freezing, which would mean death. Thio became fidgety man again, going from side to side, heading for.....No idea; he had no idea where anyone was, again.

"Drop Thio, on the ground.....Now !" Shouted Lily.

He dropped into the leaf mould and heard several shots. When he thought the action was over, Thio looked up. Lily was going through the pockets of one of the men.

"We got them all, Thio." She said. "Well done, you took out your man."

At that moment, he'd have done anything for Lily; he'd have died for her. Thio looked around and all the dead guys were quite close to him. During the fight it had felt as though they'd all been so far away.

"Come on, we needed a live one." Said Lily. "Now we'll have to make do with what they had on them. Go through their tents.....Grab anything that might be useful."

"I think.....I have, I've been shot." Said Thio.

Lily look at the blood stain on his jacket and prodded at the bullet hole in his sleeve. Thio winced, but it wasn't that painful.

"That's not shot.....What you did to the guy shot in the throat. Now that.....That is being shot. Come on Thio, get moving. Search their tents."

"Fine, I'm on it." He said.

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Ruby was already awake when Cal arrived with news of the tomb. Not dressed, though she had draped clean clothes over the chair next to their bed. Todd wasn't panicking, or underplaying the situation. If ever Ruby wondered why she'd put Todd in charge of organisation and training for her army of wunderkinds; he was proving why he'd been a good choice.

"I called one of Spiders contacts at DINI." Said Todd. "Your concerned friend at the CIA was right; two staff were killed at Alessia House. A cleaner on the ground floor and a gardener in one of the tool sheds. Eugenie still isn't picking up her phone."

"Reception on the mountain roads is crap, we know that." Said Ruby. "With luck she's on her way here, bringing Lorenzo with her. So, how big a pile of crap are we in ?"

Cal arrived looking agitated, but she'd have to join the queue. Ruby pointed at a chair in their partitioned off areas in the new accommodation trailer. Todd and her didn't have a huge amount of space, but it was clean and comfortable.

"Sit for a moment, Cal." She said. "I promise you're next in the queue."

"Fine.....We found the tomb." Said Cal.

"Great.....So Todd, are we going to have to return to Lima ?" Asked Ruby.

Was she just trying to shift the blame if they all ended up being interrogated by the Lima police ? Ruby would have denied that, but knew it was lurking at the back of her mind.

"Two people were killed.....That's awful." Muttered Cal.

"You're here about something else, Cal." Said Ruby. "So.....Shush or wait outside."

Cal nodded and went quiet. Ruby looked at Todd, who'd had long enough to think of a plausible answer.

"No, though there is no warranty with that opinion." Said Todd. "At the moment there is no link between us and the two deaths. Just a burglary gone wrong....We could even ask your American friends to push that idea with the local cops."

"Good, though their deaths are of course....Terrible news." Said Ruby. "I didn't want to have to get everyone back on the bus, we've too much to do here."

"I know a few ex-army guys." Said Todd. "Mercenaries really, though they're reliable and get the job done. I could make a few calls and get them living in Alessia House for a while."

Ruby had picked it up from Kallina, looking at the ceiling while she thought something through. On the ceiling near the door, was a huge spider with furry legs. A massive arachnid, Cal seemed to be looking at it too. Tempting to zap it, but the creature was doing them no harm.

"Not for now, Todd." Said Ruby. "Nothing says people with something to hide, better than a band of mercenaries in the kitchen. Keep their number handy though, just in case.....Anything else?"

"No.....Can we look at this tomb now?" Asked Todd. "It sounds interesting."

"Yes....Tell us about it on the way, Cal." Said Ruby. "Lead the way, take us to the tomb.....I've always wanted an excuse to say that."

Cal talked and Ruby listened. Sophie joined them on the way, with the news that Eugenie and Lorenzo had stopped for coffee just outside Lima and they were on their way. Cal wasn't the best person in the world at describing things, though Ruby got the gist of it. So, Baba Yaga had prepared her final resting place well in advance. Not that much of a surprise and Ruby did seem to have been brought to the dig site in tiny steps. A lot of good luck had led her to Professor Ellie Nicholas, mixed with coincidences and something else.....A nagging idea in Ruby's head. The idea of putting Baba Yaga's ashes in the tomb was obvious; there'd be no argument about that.

"We could encase her tomb in reinforced concrete." Ruby muttered, probably at herself.

"Fine, until Ellie returns in the spring with an army of diggers and a few kilos of Amatol." Said Todd.

"What's Amatol?" Asked Cal.

"Industrial explosive." Said Todd.

It was a problem and simply putting the whammy on Ellie wouldn't solve it. Too many students from too many different parts of the world. Making them all her obedient minions was possible, but Ruby found the idea repugnant. Besides, eventually the whammy would fail on a few of them and the truth would come out. There had to be a solution to getting Ellie's agreement to hide the tomb, without recourse to any unpleasant means.

"Ruby.....What is happening?" Said Ellie. "Tilda dragged me out of bed, yelling about vandals wanting to destroy walls.....Or something like that."

"It's him.....Spider is the worst.....He's a damn Visigoth." Shouted Tilda

Ellie was still in her pyjamas, with a gown hurriedly thrown over the top. Birds nest hair and a few minor signs of a hangover. Professor Nicholas sort of gave Ruby a 'help me out here,' shrug.

"What's a Visigoth?" Asked Cal.

There was no blaming the girl, she was there to learn.

"They sacked Rome in around four hundred and ten AD." Said Sophie. "Nasty lot by all accounts."

"Like him....I told you.....Spider is the worst." Yelled Tilda.

And so it began, the usual arguments between archaeologists and the Visigoths, who seemed to be anyone who wasn't an archaeologist. Ruby knew she had to get an agreement with Ellie quite quickly, before everyone woke up and picked a side.

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Lily had taken a while to realise that the guy she'd shot in the chest, wasn't actually dead. It was Thio's fault of course, refusing to admit that she'd fired the killing shot. His gunfire had gone wide, though he'd kept arguing that he'd taken care of two of the Colonel's men. For someone with an obvious crush on her, Thio had changed in the blink of an eye. When it came to being credited for completing a mission, Thio was obviously willing to argue for the recognition he considered was due to him. Things had become a little heated at one point. Hardly surprising that she hadn't checked to make sure all three of the dead men.....Were actually permanently deceased.

"You're not just pretending he's not dead, are you ?" Thio had asked her.

That had been the low point. From crush with MI6 training who could do no wrong, to someone who'd do anything to rob him of a confirmed kill.

"There's a heartbeat, Thio. Put your ear on his chest if you think I'm lying."

"No, that's alright.....I believe you." Thio had muttered.

All the times Todd had wanted to thump Thio and she'd defended him. Now Lily wanted to give him a minor battering. The feeling became worse when she spotted him checking the non-dead guy for a pulse. She'd started to think of him as the bastard, which never boded well. Lily had reverted to being almost a script from a seventies gangster movie.

"Are you looking for trouble, Thio ?" She'd asked.

"No.....No, I'm not."

"You mumble kid.....Did you say yes ? Do you want trouble ?" She'd asked.

"No.....Sorry, I've upset you. I don't want any problems with you."

He'd looked scared and she'd felt a lot happier. Childish really, but they had been through a gunfight with two fatalities. Even though they'd won, there were bound to be emotional consequences. Then there was Luis to get down from the ridge, hopefully still alive. Peru had ID cards and the man had one using the name Luis with a second name that sounded more Mexican than Peruvian. The card was probably fake, but as they had to call him something, Luis would do.

Luis wasn't a huge man, though he was a long way from being scrawny. He'd been difficult to move over rough ground, which became worse when he periodically woke up. There was a little yelling and quite a few insults aimed their way. The things the Colonel was going to do to them were detailed and very graphic. If Ruby hadn't needed him to interrogate, Luis might well have been the victim of an unfortunate accident. Strange as it was, the mutual suffering caused by getting Luis down off the ridge, brought them together. By the time they saw Mars and a few students came to help them carry the guy who'd been shot, Lily was thinking of Thio as a friend once again. Sometimes it was like that, buddies fused together by a shared adversity. Lily was currently hoping Mars would take Luis off their hands, at least for a while.

"Wow, he's been shot." Said Jim. "Who shot him ?"

Now there'd been time to think, Lily was less certain the bullet had been hers. Everything had happened so fast, in a very small area of woods at the top of the ridge. She decided to be non-committal.

"We did, Thio and I.....I'm hoping Mars can look after him." Said Lily. "I heard she's your official medical expert."

Thio looked happy and as for Mars.....She couldn't have looked happier if Lily had given her a three month old puppy as her very own.

"I've had a few courses.....Really; you want me to tend to his wounds ?" Asked Mars.

“Yes, keep him alive for us Mars.” Said Lily. “Thio and I have worked hard to get him here; it’d be a terrible disappointment if he stopped breathing.”

“Yeahhhh....Luis is almost a friend.” Said Thio.

Mars had plenty of help, a whole gang of students to help her carry Luis away to wherever the medical equipment was waiting for such an emergency. Before she left, Lily touched Mars on the arm.

“Don’t un-tape his hands, Mars.” She said. “He’s hurt I know, but he could still be dangerous.”

“I’ll tape him to the bed too, belt and braces.” Said Mars.

“Do you know where Ruby is ?” Asked Thio.

It seemed Ruby was at the tomb, a place that didn’t seem to have existed when they’d left the camp. Jim volunteered to show them where Ruby and the professor had been arguing since before first light.

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Colonel Arthur Moore trusted the competence of the men who served him, though he hadn’t enjoyed being driven at high speed along mountain roads. It was possible to get from Lima to the dig site in just a few hours, if you were willing to risk running into a stalled bus, or a piece of agricultural equipment with no lights. Water was an issue too, the way small streams could quickly flood sections of an already poor road. The Colonel had proven himself under fire so many times; no one would, or could, question his bravery. Being driven at speed was putting his life in the hands of another though, which he never enjoyed. He looked at the old watch on his wrist, a present from his father after a young Arthur had killed his first enemy soldier.

“How long now ?” He asked.

“A few minutes, we’re as good as there.” Said the driver.

Dark out there, no lights at all, apart from a slight glow to the east. That had to be the dig site; he’d had information on the improvements since Ruby had become involved with the project. No one spent that kind of money unless they wanted something in return. Two cars following and another two in front, containing enough soldiers to get the job done. The convoy slowed down a little after the next bend. There had been no contact with the men left to watch the dig site, not since the previous day.

“No one there.....Tell the lead car to move on.” Said Arthur.

Three men in the camp and it looked like all of them had been killed or taken prisoner. No student archaeologists were capable of that; it had to be Ruby’s people. He’d known, he’d seen the position of the ridge on several maps. It was too close to the camp, too exposed. One of men there had been certain they’d been seen a few times, while out on patrol. Walt had told them to wear a lot of blue and try to look like cops.

“No more unnecessary risks, Walt.” Said Arthur. “You’ve done a good job, but I’ll be in charge now. No one does anything without my approval.”

“Yes Colonel.” Said Walt.

Walt had risen to dizzying heights in the official American armed forces, but that had been then. Easier when you had a dozen drones feeding you solid intelligence and plenty of troops waiting as backup. Walt had been a hero in Afghanistan, but that was then and this was now. Arthur was good at getting the maximum out of a small budget and minimal resources. Plus, Walt hadn’t come back from Afghanistan as quite the same guy who’d arrived there.

“This is it, the track on the left.” Said the driver. “We’re there.”

Their cars had been bought outright, an essential expense to be certain they couldn't be traced. Not clunkers, though none of them were exactly in the first flush of youth. The two front cars appeared to vanish, as their rear lights left the road. Then their driver was following them along a track that would have challenged a mule convoy.

"Slow.....We don't want to break an axle." Said Arthur.

"Sorry, Sir." Said the driver.

Did cars have axles these days ? Arthur wasn't sure, but hit enough holes in the road and something would eventually break. At a crawl they arrived at the large but poorly maintained building that had been rented under another name. A genuine name, just not the name of anyone Arthur actually knew. A Marion Weedon from Nebraska had rented the place for a family getaway, though the real Marion was eighty and an only child. Arthur lowered the car window and took a good long look. It was dark, but the car's headlights lit up the building very well. It looked wonderfully neglected; the kind of building no one looks at twice. The kind of place where Bin Laden had successfully avoided the security forces of the entire free world, for years.

"Oh, that is perfect." Said Arthur.

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