

## Ruby IV : Just A Shadow

### Chapter 6 – One Of Us

**“Look at her.....How is she even alive ?” Asked Spider.**

**“She’s Baba Yaga, and she is deathless.” Said Ruby. “God doesn’t want her and the devil is scared of her.”**

**“Is that true Ruby, or just a weird nursery rhyme ?”**

**“I’m honestly not sure Spider.....I really can’t be sure.”**

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Todd Pitkethly was just Todd, to just about everyone. It was his first name, though some assumed it was his surname. That suited Todd, as no one could pronounce his family name and at college, it had always started the inevitable questions about where he came from. His full name appeared on his passport and driver’s licence, but he was rarely known as anything other than Todd. Even before joining the army, he’d been a quiet and very private person. He’d gone even further into his shell after being selected for a special operations unit. In many ways, a relationship with Ruby was perfect. She hid it better than him, but she too was hiding in plain sight. Like him she was damaged and damaged people tend to recognise one another.

“Oh yes, I’ve missed you too Constanze.” He said.

He’d picked up Ruby’s cat from Angie the downstairs neighbour, before unpacking, or reading the stick it notes on the bedroom mirror. The cat was purring loudly, as he carried her into the flat, he shared with Ruby. Constanze was old and occasionally a bit grumpy. He had a great affection for the cat though and filling her food bowl was done, before he’d even set the coffee machine gurgling and hissing.

General post it notes were on the fridge door, with personal and intimate messages on the bedroom mirror. A strange system in a digital age, but it worked for them. Todd waited until he had coffee and cheese on toast, before examining the front of the fridge. A few notes about mundane things, like checking her post for bills and her telephone answering machine for anything urgent or dramatic. Dramatic was one of her words, a Ruby saying.

“I can handle danger, Todd.” She’s once told him. “It’s all the unnecessary dramatics that drive me nuts.”

Mainly the dramatics came from Sarah, who still occasionally called ten or twelve times a night, if she was feeling upset about something. Always an even number of calls, which was one of Sarah’s things, one of her pet foibles. Despite moaning about one another, he’d realised quite early on, that Ruby and Sarah were inseparable.

Two letters, neither of them bills. Todd listened to the three messages on the answerphone and all three were telesales people trying to sell something. Ruby went abroad a lot, so did he. They were both very good at organising things so that urgent or dramatic things rarely caught them by surprise.

“What do you think Constanze.....The supermarket to fill up the fridge first, or look at the notes in the bedroom ?”

The cat licked her lips, as she curled up on a chair. Todd decided on the bedroom first, in case something urgent was waiting for him. There were a few notes about how much she was going to miss him and one mentioning a holiday once all the current fuss was over, a proper holiday.

“Oh yes Ruby, that sounds wonderful.” He muttered.

The piece of nonsense in the Balkans had ended well, no one dead or even seriously injured. Todd felt tired though, deeply fatigued. He hadn't felt properly rested for months. Ruby had mentioned a walking holiday in the vicinity of Machu Picchu, which sounded perfect. There was an envelope leaning against the mirror, an envelope with his name on it.

“Please don't be anything dramatic.” He mumbled.

A thin envelope containing a single sheet of paper, with Ruby's neat but tiny handwriting on it. The name of a firm of solicitors in Harrow called Michaels, Brooks and Shafto. It seemed they understood Ruby's complex financial affairs and could sort things out, if anything happened to her. There was an office number for them and a mobile for Mr Brooks.

“Fuck.”

Todd's first instinct was to give the cat back to Angie and book a flight to Paris. He knew she'd intended to go to Paris and then probably Budapest to catch up on news from Olga. Paris would be the best place to start, the place where Ruby had jumped down the rabbit hole, again. He hadn't been invited though, on her journey with the wunderkinds and a few muggles who were like family to her. He loved Ruby, but they hadn't known each other for that long. If the note was just sensible caution in case of the worst and he arrived like the proverbial bull in a China shop.....

“Let's fill the fridge up and buy some cat food.....Then I'll make a few calls.”

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Anna had been surprised at how hard it was to say goodbye when they reached the docks in Mombasa. Seeing Doc again had woken up old feelings, that were best kept fast asleep. She was a European by inclination as well as birth. There was no way she'd permanently move to Kenya and Doc felt the same way about his own country. There was no future for them, but she'd still shed a private tear once Doc had left them at the Ajax and driven off.

“Are you alright ?” Sarah had asked her.

“I will be Sarah....I will be.”

“Come and find me if you need to talk.”

Anna had seriously thought about cutting Sarah once. Nothing fatal, just a ragged knife wound that would hurt like hell and take a long time to heal. They were almost friends now, and they did share a lot of respect for one another. It mattered that Sarah had made the offer, even if Anna had no intention of asking her for help.

The Captain of the Ajax had talked to Doc, who seemed to know everyone. The captain was the most Greek looking man Anna had ever seen. Surprising as Ruby told her he was an Armenian by birth. Captain Hayk Sargsyan was a jolly man who looked about fifty. After talking to Doc, he treated them all like long lost relatives and Ruby....He treated Ruby as though she was visiting royalty.

“Cabins will have to be shared.” Hayk had told them. “You should be comfortable though; it is only for two or three nights.”

Things would be cramped, just about everyone was sharing a cabin. After the whole buckets on a plane thing, no one was complaining. Anna had travelled on one or two cargo boats that specialised in illegal cargoes. The cabins tended to be infested with bed bugs and the kitchens full of cockroaches. The Ajax was different, all the facilities were about the same level as a middle of the range motel. Then again, the Ajax didn't always carry dodgy cargo. They were in the bulk grain storage area of the docks and the Ajax was taking onboard a full load of grain. Not everything in Mogadishu was about crime, warlords and terrorism, despite what the press might say. There were over two and a half million people in Mogadishu and they all needed feeding. The Ajax was

transporting grain destined for several large bakeries. Maybe Olga had asked Captain Sargsyan to keep things legal while Ruby was onboard ? Whatever the reason, the only slightly iffy thing on the cargo boat, was them.

“Now this is the kind of cabin sharing I like.” Said Delmar.

If her emotional farewell from Doc had upset him, Delmar wasn't showing it. The cabin they were sharing had a double bed and even an ensuite bathroom. It felt more like a romantic trip for two, than roughing it on a bulk grain carrier.

“The Ajax even has a cook.” She said. “No getting up at dawn to cook breakfast for everyone.”

“I get the impression Sophie was looking forward to that.”

Wasn't christening a room by having sex, traditional ? If it wasn't, it should have been. Anna locked the door and began to undress. No need to tell Delmar her intentions, he understood as soon as her trouser came off. Anna had decided sex broke people down into two distinct groups, regardless of gender and sexual preference.

“Oh, I've been looking forward to this all day.” Said Delmar.

“You can't leave your socks on.” She said, it was a pet peeve.

For some there had to be a lot of feelings for someone. They had to be almost in love with a partner, before anything was kissed, licked, sucked, or inserted. The emotional bonding from sex. Merely cemented the feelings that already existed.

“Deeper Delmar....Go in deeper.” She moaned.

The other group, to which she belonged, viewed sex as a need. A very pleasurable need, but often the partner could be almost a complete stranger. A one-night stand picked up at a bar would do, as long as all the right bits were there. Sexual gratification was the key thing, satisfying the need.

Sometimes the bonding led on to more than just sex, sometimes it didn't. Anna still wasn't sure if coupling with Delmar was going to lead to anything more than a lot of really great sex.

“Roll over, I want to go on top for a while.” She said.

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Eugenie had felt a definite buzz as the plane had landed at Budapest Airport. Her Hungarian was passable, but a fifth of the population spoke English and with her fluent German; she was sure she'd get by. Like Ruby, she viewed Budapest as the gateway to the path less travelled. Then there was Olga of course, who she couldn't even imagine living in London, New York, or anywhere else for that matter. Hungary was sometimes the angry, shouty guy of Europe. That didn't stop Eugenie thinking of Budapest as somewhere very special. Travelling with Lorenzo was nice, seeing the city for the first time again, through his eyes. He was looking out of the taxi window, as they passed through Budapest from east to west.

“I've always wanted to come here.” He said. “We will get time to be tourists, won't we ?” He asked.

“I'm here as a consultant Lol, there'll be plenty of time to look around.”

He was giving her the look again, the one that said he didn't understand how a woman who looked no more than twenty three, could be a consultant for a Hungarian gang. It was a weird cover story, but better than the truth. Trudy had given birth to a child fathered by a human and then Lisa had given birth about a year later. Neither child showed signs of being anything other than a normal healthy baby. Their DNA was likely to be a little strange, but neither child was a monster. Best of all, the fathers had no idea that the women in their lives were a little more than human. Lorenzo might not turn out to be the one, but Eugenie now hoped that eventually, marriage and kids weren't unthinkable. She had to think of a better cover story though, in case anything weird happened.

“How long have you known Olga ?” He asked.

“Since I was a child.”

Her mind did a flip. Did that make sense, with the way Olga looked ? How old was Olga anyway, thirty five, maybe a year or so older ? Eugenie began to realise the problems Trudy and Lisa had faced with human lovers.

“Actually, since I was at school, when I think about it.” She said. “You’ll fancy Olga, all men fancy Olga. A bit of fear too, but they all fancy her.”

“She sounds interesting.”

Eugenie leant in towards Lorenzo, close enough to whisper.

“You’re mine Lol, no one else can have you.”

They kissed and Lol never did see some of the famous landmarks he’d wanted to see on the way from the airport. They were still kissing when the taxi stopped.

“Just sound your horn and they’ll open the gate.” Said Eugenie.

The driveway led up to a large mansion that was impressive. Not Palace of Versailles impressive, but for a private mansion, it was really impressive. The sort of place where even Bill Gates wouldn’t have thought he was slumming it.

“Wow, does Olga have a pool ?” Asked Lol. “A place that size, she must have a pool.”

“Knowing Olga, she’s probably got two.”

Two large muscular men came out to get their cases out of the taxi. Olga quickly followed them, insisting on paying the taxi fare from the airport. Eugenie rarely looked into the mind of a lover, but she did give Lorenzo’s mind a quick look. Only shallow delving, she had no wish to see his deeper thoughts. Looking into the mind of a lover could be a minefield, as she’d learned the hard way. Lol definitely fancied Olga though, and he was little scared by her.

Olga showed them to a room that was larger than some of the apartments Eugenie had rented. Very chintzy, perfect for a romantic break. Not that she expected Olga to let her have that much free time.

“Can I borrow Eugenie for a moment, Lorenzo ?” Asked Olga. “Not for long, just while you’re unpacking.”

“Yes, of course. No problem.”

Olga took her along the corridor and into a room done out as an office. Several cubicles with computers set up, though they had the room to themselves.

“I need you tonight, Eugenie.” Said Olga. “Did Ruby tell you about Julius Sima ?”

“Yes, we had a long phone conversation. I am fully briefed on him and his business.”

“His office has closed up and his staff were all fleeing the sinking ship.” Said Olga. “My men managed to find his PA before she could get on a plane to somewhere far away. Money worked; we didn’t need any other forms of persuasion. She gave us a lead on this Flex, a young man with a reputation for being dangerous.”

“Great, when are we going after him ?”

“I’m glad you asked that.” Said Olga. “My best people are planning to hit his rented villa tonight. He’s a nasty one, really bad I’m told. Plus, he always travels with a couple, who are probably military trained. We need you Eugenie, we need you and your gifts.”

“Let me get Lol settled, then I’m all yours.”

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Ruby didn’t know what Doc had told Captain Sargsyan, though he was still treating her like Mother Theresa mixed with a little pinch of Satan. She hadn’t needed to use her special smile on him. The captain was thrilled to have her on his ship, but also a little nervous of her. It was all fine with her.

He'd let her use a small section of the hold, usually used for cargo that most nations would consider illegal. He'd arranged to have the area cleaned and cleared of junk, before giving her the key to the door. Probably not the only key, but the captain was too in awe of her to start spying on her. A small bed, a few blankets and one or two hygiene essentials and the room was ready. Purely by chance she'd met Spider between decks and insisted on his company.

"I'm just going down to the hold Rupert.....You can come with me."

"Sarah will wonder where I've got to." He said.

"Don't worry, I'm not going to chuck you overboard, though that did cross my mind."

It hadn't occurred to her that the hold with its single bed and bucket, looked like a quickly put together prison cell. Spider was scared of her; she could feel it coming off him in waves.

"I'm not imprisoning you Spider; this room is for Kallina." She said. "I think she needs total privacy to heal, at least for a while."

"After the Foxy business, I did wonder." Said Spider. "I'm really sorry, but Foxy is one of us."

"He isn't, not really. You and Sarah are family, as are Anna and Olga. With the rapidly growing and changing wunderkinds, we're a family. Foxy may have helped us all in the past, but he isn't and never will be family. You must remember that Spider...Always remember that."

"I will, I promise."

"I was going to be alone to bring her here, but you can stay. If I need to lift her onto the bed, the two of us can do it more gently than I could do it alone."

"Yes, of course I'll help. How will you bring her here?" Asked Spider.

"I'm going to pull her out of a dream. Grab a chair, Spider. This might take a while."

All energy transmitted through the ether, travelled better at night. Everything from long wave radio to contacting departed spirits. It all worked better when the sun wasn't bombarding the atmosphere with all kinds of ionised particles. With a little thought, it was all fairly obvious. So, Ruby had waited until after nightfall to grab Kallina out of a dream. Spider being there was unintentional, but he had a way of being useful.

"Do I have to do anything?" Asked Spider.

"No, I'll let you know when I need you. By the way don't worry, no matter what you might see."

Ruby lay down on the still slightly grubby floor. A metal floor with a plywood covering, though the cold of the metal still came through. Baba Yaga had taught her how to keep focused in far from ideal situations. Come to think of it, Baba Yaga had taught her all she knew about the manipulation of dreams. Ruby ignored the cold and minor discomfort.

Ruby Mason willed herself to sleep and within a few seconds, she was deeply asleep. Ruby let her mind take her wherever it wanted, which was a dream about sex with Todd. She'd been having those kinds of dreams a lot lately. Enjoyable, but it wasn't going to achieve anything. She pictured an image of Baba Yaga in her mind. A fit and strong Baba Yaga, as she'd been when they'd fought side by side in North Korea.

"So, you convinced them to take me back?"

Kallina as Baba Yaga, standing in a garden Ruby didn't recognise. Baba Yaga was in her young woman persona, the one that had led many men to whatever fate awaited them.

"Yes, we need to start the healing process tonight."

"Fine, the sooner the better."

Ruby concentrated on the dream image of Baba Yaga and then switched the background in her mind. She saw the bed in the hold of the Ajax and overlaid Baba Yaga into the image. At least it felt as though that was how it worked; she was never certain. The important thing was that it had

worked. There was a confusing mixture of sounds and images, as Ruby came out of dream and woke up. Kallina was there, but not as a young Baba Yaga. The broken creature was lying next to her on the floor, the thing of broken bones and the smell of corruption.

“Spider, help me.....we need to get her on the bed.”

No good, he looked frozen to the chair. Ruby wasn't picking up fear from Spider, just a hell of a lot of shock.

“Spider ! Help me.” She shouted.

“Yes, of course.”

Together they lifted the pile of broken bones and weeping tissues, onto the bed. The only sign that Kallina still lived, was a steady, but dreadful wheezing sound as she breathed. Ruby placed her hands on Kallina's forehead and used her gift of healing. Healing injuries that grievous was rarely quick, but Ruby was sure the wheezing sound improved, just a little.

“We should leave her now.” Said Ruby. “Around midnight I'll bring everyone down here and the healing ritual can really begin.”

“Look at her.....How is she even alive ?” Asked Spider.

“She's Baba Yaga, and she is deathless.” Said Ruby. “God doesn't want her and the devil is scared of her.”

“Is that true Ruby, or just a weird nursery rhyme ?”

“I'm honestly not sure Spider.....I really can't be sure.”

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First night home, with a Thai takeaway eaten and a happy Constanze purring on his lap. There was a movie on Netflix he'd heard was good and it should have been a night for a glass or two of wine, then chill. Todd tried never to make a drama out of a crisis and the note about the solicitors in Harrow wasn't even close to a crisis. Was that kind of note normal for Ruby ? Had she left that kind of note for Serge ? It crossed his mind that maybe not getting a little worried, made him a selfish boyfriend. He paused the movie in the middle of a car chase and rubbed the cat's ears. The problem was knowing who to call. Just about everyone who might know how much danger Ruby was in, were with her, on their way to somewhere off the grid.

“What do you think Constanze, am I becoming a stalker ?”

The cat moved up his chest and bonked her head into his nose. Todd wasn't an expert on cats, but he knew that Constanze was being affectionate. He hadn't expected a reply of course, despite being owned by the witch Baba Yaga, Constanze was just a cat. Her motivation for just about everything was food related, especially a bowl of tuna. She flopped down on his chest and began to give her loud, stroke me purr.

“So, you've no idea either.” He muttered.

He went through a mental list of anyone who might know him, know Ruby and trust him enough to talk to him. Not George, Ruby would hate that. Not Foxy, for similar reasons. It had to be one of the wunderkinds who hadn't gone with her, but not one who might hold a grudge about not getting an invite. Trudy and Lisa had babies, which meant they'd be busy twenty-four seven.

“Not Lau, the guy is an arsehole.” He muttered. “You know what Constanze, I think Isobel is worth a call.”

Isobel had been born in Edinburgh in eighteen hundred and something, he wasn't exactly sure.

Thanks to Kallina keeping the kids in stasis for years, she looked like a twenty year old. Todd liked Isobel and she'd been quite friendly towards him. As with most of the thirteen who went to Africa,

he had her number saved on his iPhone. He had no idea where she currently was in the world, but that didn't seem to matter, he only needed a quick talk over the phone.

"So, it's agreed cat.....I'm going to pester Isobel."

Constanze bumped his nose again and held eye contact, which she'd never done before. For a moment, he wondered if she was agreeing with his decision. She was a witch's cat after all. The moment quickly passed.

"I'm going crazy, but if this call is helpful.....There's a tin of tuna in it for you."

He called Isobel's number and waited, while his call was connected. Then it seemed to ring for a while. Was she somewhere on another continent ? She obviously still had his number in her list of contacts.

"Hi Todd, it's been a while.....It's been too long."

"Am I calling at a weird time Isobel ? I can call back later if it's the middle of the night there."

"I've got a place in North London. I think we're just about in the same time zone as Hackney."

"I could do with a bit of advice." Said Todd. "I don't want to pry into Ruby's business, but she left me a note that worries me, just a little."

"Alright.....Fire away, what's worrying you ?" Asked Isobel.

"This has to be just between you and I."

"You have my solemn promise, Todd. I will keep whatever you say, confidential."

"It might be nothing."

"Out with-it Mr Pitkethly ? There's a movie on Netflix I want to watch before bedtime."

"The one with the huge car chase ?"

"Yes, that's the one."

"I have it on pause.....Anyway, I got home to find an envelope leaning on Ruby's dressing table mirror....."

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Charlotte lost all animosity towards Kallina, when she saw the ruined body on the bed. Like Spider, she wondered how the horrendously injured body, continued to breathe. Kallina had been the first person they'd all thought of as mother. She'd protected and hidden them during the period when every security organisation in the world, seemed intent on wiping them out. She'd educated them, housed them and fed them. Charlotte still remembered Kallina crying for days after Patrick had been killed. Some of Kallina's decisions had been eccentric to say the least. Keeping them in stasis for years had been a ludicrous thing to do, but it had been done out of love. Charlie knelt next to the bed and held a hand that had no warmth.

"We're going to heal you, mother." She said.

Ruby had asked everyone to be there and everyone had arrived. It seemed Anna had been entrusted with the key. She locked the door once they were all inside the small section of the cargo hold. The main cargo was grain, which had a stronger smell than Charlie had expected. It seemed to permeate everything. Ruby was drawing a circle in the centre of the space, while muttering some sort of incantation.

"What are you doing ?" Asked Charlie.

"We'll all use our own gifts to heal Kallina in our own way. Baba Yaga is a witch though, maybe the greatest of all the witches. I know something of her craft and a witch....Is best healed by witchcraft."

Charlie merely nodded, it made sense. Ruby wrote symbols around the inside of the circle.

Characters from a language Charlie didn't know. An ancient language probably, as it looked similar to Egyptian hieroglyphs. Ruby then drew larger characters inside the circle and Charlie knew one or

two. They were symbols used during the summoning of particularly dangerous entities. What was Ruby going to call up ? Charlie just hoped Ruby had the skill to get rid of it after she was finished with it.

“I need help now.” Said Ruby. “Kallina’s bed needs to be at the centre of the circle....Gently of course, we need to move her very gently.”

How close was Kallina to death ? Her breathing sounded as though it might stop at any moment. Charlie lifted a corner of the bed, with Spider and Sophie helping too. They carefully and very gently, placed the bed where Ruby was pointing. Ruby muttered something and the outer edge of the circle, briefly glowed bright red.

“No one touches the circle now.” Said Ruby. “Touching it could well mean death, especially for those who are totally human.”

“What the hell are you going to call up, Ruby ?” Asked Sophie.

“One whose name must never be spoken casually.....A circle now, you all need to form a circle around Kallina and then hold hands.”

The circle on the ground was large and after Ruby’s warning, everyone was keeping well away from it. There were just enough of them to form a circle and comfortably hold hands.

“Alright, no one breaks the circle until I say.” Said Ruby. “All of Kallina’s children have healing skills, so use them now. Our human friends have no gifts, apart from their life force, their energy. We will take a little of that energy and use it to help heal Kallina. Begin now.....”

So, using humans as batteries when the need was great. Charlie knew Ruby had done it before. One or two might throw up afterwards and feel confused for a while. None of them would suffer any long-term damage. They’d understand the need, they were all family.

Charlie knew how to heal and there was enough energy in the group to power her gifts. Everyone was using a different gift, though they all had one intent, to bring Kallina back to full health. Charlie concentrated on Kallina and linked to her. Invisible links, no one could see them but her. Ideally it required a sacrifice of some kind. The little finger on either hand would provide more than enough life force. Charlie wasn’t keen on losing a finger, so she felt outside of the Ajax. The ocean was full of life, some large, some small. No need to take the life from anything large, the ocean was full of tiny swimming crustaceans. Krill were all around the Ajax, in huge numbers. Charlie drained them of their life force and poured it into Kallina.

“Heal Baba Yaga, heal.” She muttered.

The pouring energy must have become so intense, that it became visible. Spider gasped and something changed in Kallina. She was still far from completely healed, there was more of her though, more substance. As Kallina herself would have put it, there was now some meat on the bones. As Charlie rested, Sophie took over and quite quickly, Kallina no long sounded like someone who might be about to breathe their last breath. Roger did his best, though healing wasn’t his area of expertise. Delmar surprised her, by pouring huge amounts of energy into Kallina. As for Ruby.....She was adding to the amount of life force going into Kallina, but not by a large amount. Charlie felt that Ruby was still building up to something, something huge.

“Don’t break the circle, Spider.” Said Ruby.

Poor Spider, he wasn’t looking too good. Armed and fighting a physical enemy was his thing.

Standing there while being drained of energy had really knocked him about. Luckily, Ruby broke the circle herself, before Spider began vomiting.

“You should all move back a little.” Said Ruby.

No words, Ruby stood with her arms pointing upwards, like a salutation to the sun. There was no sun, it was after midnight, but it was the same pose. No words, but there was an intensity about Ruby. No words, but they all moved back further when Ruby began to glow. There was heat coming from her too, as if she'd been turned into a blow torch. Eventually Charlie could see the lines of power coming down from above. When Ruby did talk her words were in Sumerian, which Charlie had never completely mastered. She knew enough to piece the incantation together. It wasn't an incantation though; it was a summoning. Ruby had dared to summon Ki, the Earth Goddess.

"Ki, listen to me, your child is near death."

"Ki, come to me, your servant needs you."

"Ki, come to aid the deathless one, or she may die."

There was more, all beseeching an ancient God for help in healing Kallina. Charlie felt something coming a few seconds before it arrived. The circle containing Kallina's bed became too bright to look at. Something was in there, something that was impossible to see. The bright light ended suddenly and Ruby looked likely to fall over. The humans were all lying on the floor, Spider was still puking.

"Thank you, all of you." Said Ruby. "We've done all we can, but I believe Kallina will now be fine. The Goddess never abandons those faithful to her."

Charlie did her best to help Spider, though she too, was feeling deeply fatigued. Ruby was knelt next to Kallina, talking to her. There were others needing aid, but Kallina was well enough to talk. Charlie knelt next to Ruby, as though they were in prayer.

"Are you alright now?" Charlie asked.

"Not completely, not yet." Said Kallina. "I will be though, I will be. I felt something when the power was inside me. There is another like us out there, waiting. Just a few miles inland, they've been following the Ajax for miles. They're one of us.....You must go and find them."

Kallina looked terrible, but at least she was healing. Before they could ask her about the stranger who was one of them, she'd fallen asleep.

"That was strange....What do we do now?" Asked Charlie.

"We go and find whoever it is."

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Eugenie had been warned there'd be a long drive in fairly clunky vehicles. Füzésabony was where Flex had rented a villa, in the county of Heves. Not that far from Budapest, though far enough for her to get fed up with the drive. Flex had two well trained and likely to be well armed, companions. Apart from that, they had no idea what else they might find in the secluded property. They were relying on her to do her thing. Olga had always been like that, treating their gifts as though it was like using radar, or aiming high tech microphones at windows. Eugenie's abilities were great, about ninety percent of the time, but they were never perfect. It was worrying her that their lack of solid information, might get one of Olga's people killed. At least Olga had sent Jakub as part of the team, her new right-hand man.

"Tell me about Füzésabony?" She asked.

"Not much to tell, a packaging plant and a Spar supermarket." Said Jakub. "The villa is to the west of town, a good mile away from any neighbours."

"Good, secluded is always good." Said Eugenie.

Flat, open country with fields full of crops. There was the occasional wooded area, but the general landscape was flat with no cover. That wasn't good, not good at all. When the driver took them off the main road, Eugenie got the full effect of clunky suspension jarring her spine.

"We have to talk to Olga about using clunkers." Said Eugenie.

“Tell me about it.” Said Jakub. “They are expendable though. Any problems and they can be dumped and burned.”

One of the men in the back chuckled.

“Personally.....I’d like to be in a nice comfy SUV.” Said the driver.

The good thing was that their small convoy of three vehicles, wasn’t likely to be remembered or look like an instant pull by the local cops. They blended in with the farming community, where twenty year old cars were the norm.

“Keep it slow.” Said Jakub. “Look for somewhere to park, well away from the house.”

The row of trees wasn’t good cover, it was just all there was. By the time the three cars were off the road, right up against the trees, they’d almost vanished. A dark cloudy night, with no moon, though that had been luck rather than planning. They were a long way from the villa, though not too far.

Once they were all out of the cars, Jakub was looking at her. The first time a group of fighters had looked at her for instructions, had been terrifying. Now Eugenie was used to it.

“Spread out and follow me.” She said. “Keep well back though, always a good twenty yards from the villa.”

“If they shoot at you ?” Asked Jakub.

“They shouldn’t know I’m there.....If they do start firing, fire back.”

A field of bright yellow flowers between them and the villa, though Eugenie was probably the only one seeing them in colour. Something had happened to her when Ruby had absorbed so much ancient power in Africa. Something had happened to all of the thirteen, even the ones on a different continent. Charlotte had become the creature of fire and burning and Sophie could fly like a bird. No one said that though, unless they wanted the hour-long lecture on levitation not being the same as flying.

“Shit !”

Once one of the people behind her had tripped in the dark, it was certain to happen. Cursing though, that didn’t and shouldn’t need to happen. Jakub would probably have a conversation with them later. So, what had happened to Eugenie’s gifts because of Africa ?

She’d always been good at seeing things. Her levitation skill, wasn’t quite as good as Sophie’s, her use of fire was nowhere near as good as Charlie’s. What Eugenie had always been good at was seeing with her mind. Solid stone walls didn’t stop her now, as long as she could get reasonably close. After whatever had been absorbed in Africa, her seeing skills had become truly incredible. She felt a tap on her shoulder. Jakub was pointing at the ground, the agreed signal that they’d reached the spot where he and his team, were going to wait.

The villa was just about visible to normal human eyes, with the general ambient light that fills the sky in any town. Eugenie could see details and colours, which should have been impossible. She nodded at Jakub and carefully carried on towards the villa. On her own and treading carefully and with the dark field behind her, the people in the villa would never see her. Infrared devices might be able to spot her, but she’d have sensed their presence. Eugenie was sure, as she touched the villa wall, that no one inside was aware of her presence.

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