#BigDamnHeroesTSW

ROLLING STONES

- Nathan & Tamsyn -



The Rolling Stones - Angie - OFFICIAL PROMO (Version 1)

The Defender made its way up a small path that could barely be called a street. The old cassette player played “Angie” by the Rolling Stones - and Nathan May sang along with a not-so-bad voice. He and Tamsyn were on their way to visit one of the greatest occult sites in history: Machu Picchu. It wasn’t their first trip and it wouldn’t be their last one. The couple had been traveling the world for months now. They were funded by the Occult Department of Oxford University while studying ancient stone formations. Machu Picchu though was a project of heart. Nathan had insisted they visit the site. He had been there before and wanted to share this experience with his girlfriend.

Their dog, Dobby, was sleeping in the bag of the van-made Defender. He had been surprisingly quiet the past hours. He should have announced his needs two hours ago, but remained in his dog bed as they got closer and closer to the site.

For a girl who has always had a permanent home, Tams adapts very quickly to new conditions. She seems to enjoy the vagabond life, discovering new places and learning things. Her powers have steadily increased since she left the academy and she has recently become involved with fire magic - life in the wild is definitely better than life in the city for practice.

As they approach the ruins, she has a tattered guide book in her lap and occasionally looks up to take in the scenery. However, she also cheerfully reads out the atrocities of the sacrifices that took place on the temple steps.

And in the meantime, she's either scratching Nathan's neck while he's driving, or scratching Dobby's ear, so as not to neglect either of them.

“The first time I’ve been here, I tried this spell. You know how every stone tells a story, written by nature, by time or by human hands? The spell works exclusively for stories made by menkind. It recreates scenes - like, moments when the stone was shaped or used. It can be a little random, I admit. Still, it’s fascinating. You get a glimpse of the past through its remains”, as always Nathan could talk for hours about his work.

By now, Tammy knows it’s much more than gemology, the subject he taught back then at Aldwych Academy. No, it’s the whole spectrum of earth magic. It’s about nature - its presence, its past and its future. A raw truth, so much to tell, so much to learn, so much potential. No surprise he could talk about it that intensively.

Maybe it was his very own excitement that roared louder than the gut feeling that should have warned him miles ago. Something about the area had changed. It was in the air. They’d smell it. It tingled at their ears long before they’d reach the sight. Something was sinking into the ancient grounds. Why didn’t Nathan feel it yet?

It’s the soft whining of Dobby in the back of the car that eventually makes Nathan May stop his monologue about stones. The man frowns a little and eventually turns the cassette player off. “Everything okay, over there Dobs?”, he asks as if the dog could answer with words. Maybe the question isn’t only aimed at him. Suddenly there is something knocking at Nathan’s senses. It’s just hard to put a finger on it yet.

As always, she listens to him in fascination. Even if the stones were the reason for their separation at the time, she has already forgiven them and therefore sinks into the stories that the stones tell through him.

"Oh, I'm so excited to hear what they'll tell you in Machu Piccu. Those must be incredibly crass stories." And she would probably be even more enthusiastic if it weren't for this mood swing. She too should have felt something. But it's not the first time her former teacher's presence (still quite spicy) has distracted her senses.

She looks back at the dog. "Everything's okay, Dobster." And while she pats his flank, she lets her eyes scanning the surroundings. At this moment they are still driving through a primeval forest, which is gradually thinning out and in the distance the first pyramid-shaped stone monument is piling up. She frowns as she murmurs, "Is there a swamp marked here?" She points to the right at a shimmering, dark... puddle?

“Not that I knew…”, Nathan admits and intuitively slows down a little. Dobby is still whining softly. And while he doesn’t leave his bed, he seems to get more and more restless the closer they get. He turns in his bed, quickly licks Tammy’s hand or chews nervously on his tail.

“Something’s wrong here”, the driver decides. “Different than the last time”. Sadly that realization comes rather late, for in that very moment, a filth inflicted person with oily skin and tentacles spreading from their head jumps on the “road” right in front of them.

The Defender crushes right into it and pushes it up the windshield, where it stares and bubbles hectically at the two bees in the car. “Oh fuck!”, Nathan curses and hits the breaks hard.

Tam's concern grows when she realizes the dog's restlessness. And then... when the former human is suddenly halfway up the hood, she screams in shock. A short, almost panicky sound before she presses deeper into her seat.

Of course, this isn't the first encounter of this kind, but... "Filth...?" She gasps out of breath, and even as Nathan steps on the brakes, she undoes her seat belt while flames are already blazing around her free hand. She reaches for the door to push it open, but instead of getting out of the car, she straightens up, one hand gripping the edge of the roof so that she can use the door half as a shield.

For a moment, Nathan watches her - but once he figures she’s doing good, his eyes move to where the filthy one came from. A swamp she had said? No, this isn’t a swamp. It’s that oily filth pool they had seen on Solomon Island or in Egypt. While Tamsyn sets the filthy man on fire (as he falls or rolls off the car in an attempt to attack her directly, Nathan does a quick study of their situation.

1. There never is only one filthy man.
2. There hasn’t been filth here before.
3. It’s probably no coincidence that it’s so close to an ancient holy site.

He doesn’t like the conclusion of it, but eventually his eyes turn back to Tams. “We got to check the situation at the site. This may get nasty…”. He tells her.

When the creature goes into open attack, it throws the flaming ball at the tentacled head. It's just a small, concentrated ball of fire. After all, there is a car tank nearby. But it's enough to set the oily mass on fire and Tams is back in the car and closing the door.

She nods almost automatically at his words. Whatever that is, it would be negligent not to check it out. "I agree." She gives him a look and squeezes his wrist briefly. "No matter how nasty, we'll do this together."

The Defender gives a roar when Nathan starts the engine once more. Already there are more of those creatures approaching them from said oily pool. The land rover quickly hits the unpaved road again, whirling up mud as its wheels roll over the burnt mess of the first filthy one.

For now they can leave the other attackers behind - they simply loose interest after a while. Sadly that doesn’t make their journey much easier. They may leave the first filthy pool behind - but Nathan and Tamsyn pass a few more on their way.

Things get even worse, when they reach the terrasses that used to reveal the ruins of the ancient city. The air is thick out here, despite the open view. It smells like rotten flesh and decay. Are some of these creatures… undead? Inka zombies? A thought that makes Nathan swallow hard as he slows down the car. It'd be suicide to drive right into this overrun ruin. Filth flows where there once were first versions of water channels. Giant spiders with long thin legs patrol the terrasses, while the filthy men seem to dig at several spots.

Nathan reaches for his phone and activates the camera - a video, not just a picture.
"We're at Machu Picchu, approaching the site from the western path. It's Monday, the 18th of April, 2 PM. Both the path and the site are overrun by the filth. We're noticing filthy men, spiders, some that look like corrupted ancient inka warriors. There might be something in the air as well. It's foggy, though not as bad as on Solomon Island?", he gives Tamsyn a questioning look - silently asking for confirmation - "I suppose there's particles in the air as well and we lack protection suits. We'll be sending the report asap and then equip ourselves. We'll need backup for a clean up. This can't be left like this…".

Half an hour later, the video messages reaches both the Occult Department of Oxford and Aldwych Academy in Ealdwic.

Tamsyn stares in disbelief at the image of devastation and filth unfolding before them. Somehow she had hoped it would be another small puddle. Not that an entire forgotten city had been taken. And something got woken up?

She turns her gaze to Nathan when he indirectly asks for her assessment and she nods. It was bad here. But certainly not as bad as the outbreaks in New England.

"Alright. We'll head back to the last village", Nathan eventually tells her and begins to turn the car. "We can't deal with this on our own. And not with Dobby in the back". To be fair, the dog played dead during the attack. He's so quiet, Tams may want to check his pulse, just to be sure he's there and alive.

"But we'll come back in the morning. Goddamnit… I was really looking forward to this", he murmurs and then takes a deep breath. "Ready, Tams? Send some of those fire balls to the pools on our way back, alright?".

She puts a hand on his forearm and squeezes it lightly. She was looking forward to this trip too. But for him it was even more painful.

After a controlling look and a groping for Dobby - he's breathing, but very quietly - she nods and rolls down her window. While Nat is still driving, she sits in the open window, holding onto the luggage rack with one hand and a fireball already floating in the other.

"I will burn whatever comes my way." And she does. As soon as they make their way through the jungle and the first filth bearer comes, she sets it on fire, as well as the next one and the one after that. Every oily puddle she sees is also set on fire.

"That's kinda hot", he admits with a half smirk. "If it wasn't so damn dangerous…". It's not like he'd be driving all easy now. They need to be fast and the area is all but smooth here.

The ride is bumpy and all of their interior is shaken up in the back. Good thing, the drawers are all closed safely. So the mess will stay in there till they open it themselves.

Some filthy creatures attempt to follow, so Tamsyn will have more to do on the road. However, they either die or lose interest once they reached a certain distance - and eventually a real road again.

"Stop flirting with me!" But he can hear the little chuckle in her voice. Undoubtedly the adrenaline.

She cleans the road in front of them and behind them, with a bad gut feeling that this is just a drop in the bucket. But they do what they can do, don't they?

When they are back on a real road, she climbs back into the car and closes the window before taking a deep breath. A little exhaustion can be seen on her face. Fire ...

"These are going to be long days." she whispers.

Indeed. It will be long days. Oxford reacts - and activates its connections to the Council of Venice to call for a backup team. The next morning, Nathan, Tamsyn and a team of eight fully equipped bees come back to the site. And the battle begins…

It takes two days and nights, till every filthy creature is defeated and both the terasses and the temples are cleaned. Still. It doesn't feel the same way it had felt those years ago, Nathan thinks. The earth will remember. And that leaves a lump in the earth mages throat.

When they eventually walk those ancient streets, Nathan holds Tam's hand quietly. Their eyes may take in what is left of the ruins. But no, he won't make them speak right now. The wounds are way too fresh and vivid here.

"You heard what they said, last night…", he eventually says. "It's not the first attack. They're everywhere… we can't just move on and pretend this was a one time thing. We need to do… something".

Tamsyn is also unusually quiet, and not just because of the exhaustion coursing through her veins. She makes no secret of the fact that fire magic exhausts her. But - it is also so effective. At his words, she looks around thoughtfully and then stops, forcing him to stop as well.

She then wiggles into his embrace and wraps her arms around his body, cheek against his chest as she surveys the tainted sanctuary.

"Why did they come here? Are they stone constellations? Or... power points? Ley lines?" It's obvious that she's half talking to him and half to herself. She thinks aloud. "Where are other places with similar... conditions?"

"There's a group of people investigating. The CoV talks about leylines, magical sites and Gaia engines", he murmurs into her hair, while wrapping his arms around her to keep her

close. “It’s our duty, you know? To visit more of those sites. And clean them… we need to make a list”.

"Gaia engines..." She mumbles under her breath as her body sinks against his and she relaxes a little. But her brain is working. "But there's no Gaia engine here, is there?" She doesn't lift her head to look around again. After all, that's where he has his face buried right now.

"Yes, it is our duty. And we do what we can."

“Not that I know. The Venice team will check it out, though”, he replies to the Gaia engine issue. He hasn’t felt any so far. But Nathan knows, the area is thick with energy, history and magic.

Later that day, when the two of them check into a hotel for the night - the Defender has to be decontaminated yet - they do make a list of places to check in themselves. That list will be their task for the next weeks.

It says:

- Li Muri, Sardinia
- Herlaugsaugen, Norway
- Ring of Brodgar, Orkney Islands (GB)
- Kyffhäuser, Germany
- Selinunte, Italy

There’s a chance the big damn heroes will hear about their work.
If they want to approach the two, the Council will gladly help to make contact.
Otherwise, Nathan May and Tamsyn Dunn will pay their dues when it comes to saving their world.

-- THE END (or the beginning?) --