

The following week
Thursday, 14th July, 2016

San Diego, California
United States of America

"How old are you," Logan asked as he and Juno chatted outside their apartment block.

"Thir - fourteen; just last week," Juno replied, suddenly remembering that her date of birth had shifted as of the previous evening.

"Oh. Happy birthday, Juno."

"Thanks, Logan."

Guinevere had given Juno permission to make friends as long as she never left the apartment complex without prior permission. As for the minor change in her age, that had also been Guinevere. Juno had been called into the living room the previous evening.

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"I ordered this the other week but could not pay for it in full until I got that little bit of extra cash. I was able to pay the thieving bastard and get these. Here - a change to your identity . . ."

Juno looked confused as she was handed a brown envelope. She ripped it open and found several official documents inside.

"You have a new Birth Certificate, a new Passport, and a document that shows you as being under my care. I have a Declaration of Emancipation to show that I am allowed to live without adult supervision - apparently."

Juno studied the name.

"Juno Richmond?"

"Yes, that is your new name."

"I think you made a mistake - I was born in 2003, not in 2002."

"I don't make mistakes, honey - it's part of your cover; you're now fourteen!"

"Cool! You think my boobs are big enough?"

"Your mouth sure is!"

"Cute."

"Well, from the looks of that boy - he likes your boobs just the way they are. . . Mine were about that size when I was thirteen or so."

"He's a boy - boy's like boobs."

"Well, he likes yours - why don't you go talk with him?"

"You're letting me go outside on my own?"

"Just don't go too far; stay within the apartment complex and follow the rules I've already set down for our safety."

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Logan was thirteen and a bit of fun to talk with. He lived in an apartment two apartment blocks over. Juno had seen him eyeing her, even before they had 'met' at the beach and Guinevere had shown them a lot more than Juno would ever have intended. Guinevere had checked the boy out, of course. He lived alone, with his Aunt. There was no sign of his parents, just his Aunt who worked in a seven-eleven down the road, a few blocks away.

Guinevere was a little startled when the front door to the apartment burst open. Instinct had her reaching for the pistol under a cushion on the couch where she sat. Juno had an enormous grin on her red face as she slammed the door behind her and then she slumped down on the couch, giggling. Guinevere released the pistol and rolled her eyes.

"What the fuck got into *you*?"

"Logan? You both had sex?"

"What are you talking about? No . . . he said - he said I was beautiful. . ."

"Oh."

"Oh! Is that all you can say, Guinny?"

"Well, he *has* seen a lot of you. . ."

"Thanks to you, cousin."

Guinevere laughed.

"So, what have you got your knickers in a twist about, then?"

"No boy has ever said that to me . . . I think I liked it."

The next morning
Friday, July 15th

Mission Road

"Not again!"

"Monday to Friday, you will do a minimum of five hours' schoolwork, plus one hour of physical exercise. On Saturdays, you will do a minimum of two hours' schoolwork, plus two hours of physical exercise. You can have Sundays off."

"Yeah - I heard you the first time you told me," Juno grouched.

"Well, it's Friday - get into the living room and get out your books."

"What if I don't want to? What are you going to do about it?"

"Do you really want to find out?" Guinevere said darkly.

"Probably not. . ." Juno grimaced as she meekly sat down ready for the day's lessons. "What have we got, today, ma'am?"

"Maybe some sex education might be a good idea. . ."

"I'm fully aware of all of that, thank you very much."

"Okay," Guinevere laughed. "Maths it is. . ."

"Why do you *insist* on calling it that. . .?"

"Because *I* can speak properly and you Americans cannot."

Two weeks later

Friday, July 29th

Juno was not what you would call a happy teenager - to be honest, she was anything but.

At first, the exercises, the sparring, even the weapons tuition, had been fun to an extent. But the fun was beginning to wane and Juno sensed that Guinevere was ramping up the training - for what reason, she had no idea. However, Juno was too proud and too stubborn to give Guinevere the satisfaction of seeing her complain and quit. Juno took everything that was dished out to her, including the bruises and the humiliation. She mastered everything which her mentor threw at her, which generally just meant that even more was thrown at the young girl.

Needless to say, Juno was changing. Her body was building muscle and her body form was changing into that of somebody who trained regularly. Guinevere could throw the girl a handful of parts and within minutes, a complete pistol would be thrown back at Guinevere. Even the young girl's bedroom had turned from a disaster area that looked like it had just been ransacked to something that a Marine Drill Instructor could recognise as perfection.

However, there was still one minor issue.

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"Will you stop scratting!"

"What?"

"Stop itching!"

"I can't help it - I *hate* it."

"You need to wear it; so, stop it!"

"I've been fine until now. . ."

"I suppose Logan enjoys seeing you poking out. . ."

Juno's face went very red and she glared back at Guinevere. Then she pulled off her T-shirt and dumped it on the floor. She then reached up behind her back and after almost a full minute (Guinevere smirked the whole time, infuriating Juno further) of fiddling, she finally ripped off the white 32-AA bra and she threw it at Guinevere who was struggling not to laugh.

"Fuck you, Ginny!"

The topless Juno grabbed up her T-shirt and stormed off into her bedroom, slamming the door behind her. Guinevere couldn't control herself any longer and she burst out laughing. In response to her laughter, she heard an angry scream from beyond Juno's closed door.

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Guinevere had *not* cut the girl any slack for almost two full weeks. It was obvious that Juno hated the training and that the girl was refusing to show any weakness. Guinevere respected the girl for that. As far as her skills were concerned, Juno was about where a fairly new Phase 1 *Predator* might be after a few months. The difference was that Juno actually wanted to be where she was, unlike a young ten-year-old who had been pulled off the streets, drugged, and beaten.

Despite her reservations, it was time to venture out onto the streets and see if young Juno *had* actually *learnt* something.

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"Lilim?"

"Yeah - your codename."

"What does Lilim mean?"

"You heard of Google?"

A few minutes later, Juno was at her laptop and typing into Google.

"How do you spell it?"

"Lima - india - lima - india - mike."

"Got it! - Woah . . . Lilim: Mesopotamian - The winged children of Lilith . . . that's you . . . blah, blah, blah . . . they would *sleep with men*, sapping their strength until they died . . . you think I'm some kind of whore, just 'cause I was raped?"

"No, honey; you know me better than that - I care about you."

"I know, sorry - it's just still a bit raw."

The next evening
Saturday, July 30th

"I'm nervous."

"I can believe that; it's your first night out.

"What if I fuck up?"

"You probably will."

"That isn't helping."

Guinevere chuckled.

"Check your equipment. . . What are you wearing?"

"Black boy-shorts, black sports bra, black t-shirt, black leather pants . . . you really like black, don't you?"

Guinevere coughed pointedly.

"Black leather jacket, black socks, and finally, a pair of boots - black, of course!"

"What are you wearing under the jacket?" Guinevere pushed.

"Leather harness with a Glock 43 and two spare 6-round magazines - not that I'll be using it . . . an ASP . . . also a six-inch, very sharp, knife," Juno finished as she checked the still healing cut on her palm.

"What did I tell you about knives?"

"A dull blade is of no use to anybody," Juno recited.

"What else?"

"I'm wearing a tight-fitting and decidedly uncomfortable vest which *should* stop a blade or a bullet - and guess what? It's in black."

Guinevere rolled her eyes and she glared at the young girl.

"You've got your gloves, hat, and mask?"

"Yes, Guinny," the teenager replied facetiously.

Guinevere slapped Juno across the face.

"What did I say?"

"Yes, Lilith - sorry. . ."

"One slip, Lilim, and we die; *remember that!*"

Guinevere tapped the younger girl sharply on the forehead with the first finger of her right hand in time with the last two words.

The two girls dismounted the motorcycle, several yards down a dark alley.

"You ready?"

"I think so. . ."

"You scared?"

"No."

"Of course, you are - scared, anxious, worried. . ."

The younger girl nodded forlornly.

"It's okay to be scared, but it's *not* okay to show it. The first time they took me out and left me in a dark place to fend for myself, I peed myself - it warmed me up, but I felt miserable at being so scared. But then I channelled that fear and I used it to keep me aware of my surroundings. I couldn't forget my wet knickers, trousers, and socks, but I knew that I was human and not just some freak. Being scared is expected and you can use those emotions, turning them around and using them on your opponent. If they see that you are scared, it will just embolden them. They see that you are confident and ready, even fearless, then they will begin to worry about beating you."

"I understand - I think."

"Honey - I am with you and I am not going to let anything happen to you. Just be careful and think before you do anything, but don't freeze up while you think or you will die. If you don't know what to do, you ask me, okay? If I don't know there's a problem, I can't help you fix it. If I think you're doing okay, but you're not, then we could both be killed."

"I'm with you, Lilith; I'll do the best I can do," Lilim replied.

"I know you will and that is all that I can expect of you."

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The darkness encompassed everything.

Lilim was scared - no argument. But she felt safe, with Lilith only a few feet away. There was no chatter, only silence, as both girls listened out for anything which might indicate an attack, an ambush. The two girls were black as the night as they blended into the shadows. Lilim watched her feet, ensuring that she did not kick a discarded glass bottle or tin can as she moved.

She had been taught how to move in a stealthy fashion, being acutely aware of her surroundings - plenty of evenings had been spent with the apartment in total darkness so that Juno could learn to move around without causing any unnecessary sound. The lesson had been harsh as Guinevere was highly skilled at the game and she would smack Juno each time the younger girl made a noise.

Lilith grinned as she watched Lilim tread purposefully and carefully. She knew full well that over time, the training would become second nature to the girl - it had to . . . if you wanted to survive. The night was intended as an easy, but challenging entry into the world of the *Predator* vigilante.

San Diego was not as bad as some cities when it came to street gangs - but just because they did not have running gun battles on the streets, did not mean that they were not there. The area which Lilith had painstakingly researched and selected for Lilim's first night out was not especially dangerous, but it was expected to be painful, if not life-threatening.

Not that Lilith was intending to let the apprentice Lilim out of her sight; not even for a milli-second.

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Lilith paused as she heard movement and chatter, a short distance ahead. She raised her left hand, fist clenched. Lilim halted a few feet behind and moved sideways into the shadows - 'Gold star, girl', Lilith thought as she moved slowly forwards to check things out. She peeked around the corner of a dumpster and smiled. After a moment's thought, she turned to Lilim, waving her forwards.

"Two guys - go get 'em, honey."

"Two!"

"They're skinny fucks - easy meet for you, Lilim."

"I'm not sure - can we do this another night?"

"I trained you. I know that you are ready. I believe in you. I will be right behind you, watching. You will be safe."

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Lilim took a deep breath, checked her equipment and then moved forwards. Her mentor's words flashed through her mind as she took in the two men. They were probably early twenties - old as far as Lilim was concerned - they also looked very comfortable being down a semi-dark alleyway at night. Both were at least a foot taller than her, but what worried her the most, was that she had absolutely no idea if either of them were armed.

She had no choice but to go ahead and face the two men. She was *not* about to give Guinevere the satisfaction of seeing her fail. Neither of the men gave her a glance, not noticing the young girl as she stepped closer and closer, until. . .

"We've got company, Mike."

"Well, hello, little lady - what might you be doing down here at this time of night?" Mike offered.

"Yeah - shouldn't you be in bed, like the other little girls?" the other man added.

Lilim did not raise to the bait - she just kept moving closer; she was fully aware that the two men would misjudge her; not seeing her as a threat of any form. That, would be their undoing, she decided.

"What do you want, little girl?"

Lilim did not answer as she took two more steps, then she spoke.

"I am going to clean the ground with your fucked up faces."

Mike looked over at his pal and he frowned.

"You need to be taught some manners, little girl," Mike growled as he stood up from the oil drum he had been sitting on. "What you think, Randy?"

"Yeah, Mike - let's fuck her up," Randy suggested as he too stood up and he produced a wooden baseball bat from behind a drum.

"So, you wanna play," Lilim growled back as she produced her ASP and flicked it open.

"She has teeth," Randy commented. "I'm looking forward to seeing what's under your mask - even more, I wanna see what's inside your panties; I like tight bitches, like you. . ."

Randy did not know it, but he had just sealed his fate.

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Lilim raised the ASP to parry the first strike from the baseball bat. The strike was harder than she had expected but she absorbed it. She began to feel something surging through her body - it seemed to embolden her, strengthen her being. The fear that she felt began to take a back seat to her anger, and her other emotions.

Mike's expression was an approving one as he watched his colleague attack the girl who was only a couple of inches over five-foot in height. Lilim kicked out, catching Randy unawares as he raised the baseball bat for another strike. He fell backwards against an oil drum, rubbing his right side. Mike decided it was time to attack the girl who appeared to have far greater skill than he had expected.

He punched Lilim in the back sending her sprawling to the concrete floor of the alley. She screamed out as she fell, but she recovered surprisingly quickly, however, before she could regain her feet, Mike followed through with a kick to her left side, sending her rolling against a pile of trash. Lilim caught Mike on the lower leg with her ASP and he retreated towards Randy who was moving back into an attack position.

Lilim leapt back to her feet; she was angry - angry at being struck. She could feel Lilith's eyes on her and she could hear some scathing comment in her mind. She had to succeed; she owed Lilith and Lilim was not about to let her down. She swung the ASP and caught Mike on his left arm, cutting deeply into the flesh. Mike roared out in anger as Lilim kicked him in the side just as she brought up her

right arm to fend off the baseball bat, catching it on her lower arm - the strike hurt but she fought through the pain, punching Mike in the face with her right fist and following through with the butt of the ASP on his head.

The man crumpled to the concrete and Lilim turned to face Randy who was apoplectic with rage at the sight of his colleague unconscious on the alley floor.

"I'm going to fuck you up and then I'm going to fuck that tight little cunt of yours!"

Lilim had no idea what happened but something inside of her just snapped and she went wild.

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Lilith had moved closer to the fight to observe and be there if Lilim began to struggle. Lilith was keen for Lilim to endure her first fight, no matter how badly it went, just so she had an idea of what a real fight entailed, one where people got hurt . . . or worse.

She had heard the comment made by Randy and she had then seen Lilim stiffen in anger. Then the girl just snapped and went crazy. She swung her ASP in deft movements, smashing Randy's right hand and forcing him to drop the baseball bat. He tried to surrender but Lilim was having none of it as she struck the man repeatedly, smashing bones and ribs alike.

Blood flew in all directions as Lilim kicked the man into unconsciousness. For a moment, Lilith thought that the fight was over, but no, Mike was stirring and he clambered to his feet behind Lilim who did not appear to have seen him. He reached under his jacket and he produced a knife - Lilim heard the noise of his footsteps and she turned.

Lilim froze at the sight of the man only two feet away, a large knife in his hand. There was a muted thump and the man stopped as a red dot appeared dead centre on his forehead. As Lilim watched with intense curiosity, she saw a red bead move downwards from the red dot and then drop off the end of the man's nose. The knife clattered to the alley floor and the man slumped on top of it.

"Let's move, Lilim!" Lilith ordered as she holstered her suppressed automatic.

Mission Road

The ride back had been very quiet.

They had stopped two miles away to remove their masks and at least make an attempt to appear normal as they returned to the apartment. Guinevere had also switched back the licence plate on the motorcycle which had been switched earlier that evening.

Guinevere had had to guide Juno up to the apartment before she returned to the world of communication.

"That was fucked up!" Juno commented.

"You did well, really well."

"Thanks."

"I said I'd keep you safe."

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"Safe."

Juno stared at her naked body in the full-length mirror. There were bruises everywhere and her body looked horrible.

"You'll be fine, Juno. Bruises heal - you just learn to move faster and avoid getting hit."

Juno stepped into the shower, grimacing with pain.

"Now I know how you felt that night after you came back all bruised to fuck - it really hurts."

"It is part of what we do - bruises are good; better than something *much* worse."

"That man - the one you shot - he scared the hell out of me; I actually peed myself - just a little," Juno admitted with some embarrassment.

"Don't be embarrassed about it," Guinevere replied seriously, without any hint of humour. "It just shows that you're human. It also shows that you need to keep an eye on your surroundings. If possible, keep your back to the wall - that is really important and I have stressed that on numerous occasions."

Juno felt sheepish as she replied.

"I lost track of things - it all moved so much faster than I had expected."

"Fights do," Guinevere explained as Juno slipped out of the shower and the already naked Guinevere slipped in and began to soap herself. "They have a habit of running away with themselves and keeping aware of the situation is crucial."

"Easy for you to say, Miss Assassin!" Juno exclaimed as she finished drying off and she pulled on an overly large T-shirt.

"I wasn't always an assassin; you know that. When I was ten, I was yanked off a busy street in Bournemouth - I was flown to the US and everything that linked me to my former life was stripped from me. My clothes were taken - even my hair was cut off. I had boys, other girls, checking out my naked body. I was forced to shower with boys and other girls that I didn't even know. Then I had some girl, a year or so older than me, beat the crap out of me. She was a special

Predator - her and her partner. They were the first and they lorded it over us mere mortals. I was one of the Second Intake, one of eighteen. Things were less organised back then. I had a friend for a little while - a couple of years . . . until some scrawny little bitch smashed her skull in the shower - one day, I am going to return the favour."

Guinevere had a special place in hell reserved for that little bitch.

The following morning

Sunday, July 31st

Guinevere awoke early as was her custom.

She had slept well and as she turned over, she felt something and she opened her eyes to see a mass of blonde hair on the pillow beside her. She chuckled. It was no surprise to find Juno back in bed with her; she had had a traumatic, but very rewarding evening.

Juno awoke just then, her brown eyes staring into Guinevere's blue ones.

"Hi, Guinny."

"Morning, Juno. How do you feel?"

"Sore. I hurt everywhere. I have bruises all over my body - I even have bruise on my right tit!"

"You must feel a right tit, then!" Guinevere chuckled.

Juno took a moment to catch on and she smiled.

"Can I go see. . ."

"Logan? Yes, you can - once you've cleaned all your gear, especially your pistol."

"But I never fired it," Juno protested.

"Doesn't matter - clean it!"

Juno reached over and she gave Guinevere a quick kiss on the cheek.

"I love you, Guinny. Thanks for looking after me."

"I love you, too. Always, Juno. We're a team and we will always be together, no matter what."

Juno giggled.

"Now don't get any ideas - I don't go in for any of that shit. . ."

"It's just dawned on me. I survived a night out as a *Predator*."

"An apprentice *Predator* - you still have a long way to go, honey."

"When are we going out again?"

"I want your bruises to heal and I want you to continue your training some more. Maybe we'll hit something together."

"Lilim will always be there for Lilith," Juno promised.

"I never doubted it," Guinevere replied as she gave her cousin a hug.