

Monday, May 16th

Douglas Park

Foxtail with Nightmare

I had taken Nightmare away from the rape scene and towards some much nicer scenery.

It was dark, but the area was reasonably well lit. I parked my Aprilia in some trees and after we had removed our helmets, we went for a walk into the park. Our presence was soon noticed and we received some cheery hellos.

“Excuse me?”

I turned to see a girl of about my own age, with another girl and a boy.

“You, are Foxtail, I think . . . but I have no idea who you are.”

“Yes, I am Foxtail.”

“My name is Nightmare.”

“Cool!” the girl replied. “I love the suit.”

“Thanks,” Nightmare mumbled in reply.

I grinned. Neither of us was used to the fans part of being in *Fusion*. Nightmare even less so. It felt strange having been a part of the CIA and thus encouraged to keep out of sight and not to stand out. I had to admit that I enjoyed being popular. Saoirse did not enjoy publicity, but Foxtail loved it!

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Rather annoyingly, the pleasant night was destroyed as some drunken yobs drifted into the park. They were definitely intending to cause trouble. We covered the retreat of the sensible kids who had, up until that point, been enjoying a pleasant evening. I brought my arm up to ward off a flying beer bottle that had been aimed at a screaming girl as she ran for cover.

It was not a place for swords, so I pulled out an extendible billy club. The first pair were so drunk I could easily sweep their feet out from under them and they went down, laughing. The next pair were not as drunk but they were rather annoyed at their colleagues being put down. I knew full well that it would be useless trying to reason with a pair of angry drunks, so I did what I could to put them down without hurting them too much.

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It was Nightmare that yelled out a warning and saved me from more than a little embarrassment. Taking advantage of the distraction that the drunken youths posed, several ne'er-do-wells approached through the darkness until they were in a position to attack.

I barely registered the weapon that was being pointed at my skull and I just reacted. The combat knife flew straight and true into the man's face. My mind clocked the weapon that the unfortunate individual had been carrying and a name popped into my mind: Qīngxíng Chōngfēng Qiāng, 2005 – quite literally: Light Assault Gun, 2005. The QCQ-05 was quite rare outside of mainland China. I filed away that little piece of information for later.

Nightmare continued to cover the escaping civilians as they ran. There was the rasp of machine gun fire and the screaming started in earnest. It was no most decidedly the time and place for swords. I

drew them both and I slashed open the first stomach and once again, I relished the smell of freshly split blood. I faced off against a pair of cunts – they were of oriental decent, which would explain the Chinese weaponry, and they seemed pissed.

“Sǐle, biǎo zi!” one of the men spat. *{Die, bitch!}*

I was a little taken aback – it was most impolite; I was not ready to die, nor was I a bitch!

“Lái ba. Xiànzài shì shíhòu mǎnzú nǐ de zǔzōng!” I shot back, which actually seemed to knock the two men for six – I aced Chinese! *{Bring it on. It's time for you to meet your ancestors!}*

Before the cunts could recover from their surprise, I launched my attack. The first lost his left arm, just above the elbow. The second brought up his Dao (a kind of sword with a broad blade) and he was able to fend off my first strike, but not the follow up with my other blade. He fell as the blood erupted from his severed carotid artery.

The remaining cunt seemed to have a change of heart and he shot at me with his pistol, a Chinese Type 77, my mind told me. He tripped which sent his bullet wide of its intended mark. I ran forwards, reached down and grabbed the man by the head. I lifted him up slightly before I twisted his head savagely.

Nightmare screamed.

“Too much?” I asked as I dropped the man’s body to the ground.

“It was great up until the point where you near enough ripped his damned head off!”

I gave her a sardonic look and smiled.

“Too violent for you? Less than an hour ago, you blew a guy’s dick off!”

“That was different...”

As we ran back to our ride, I swept up the QCQ-05 sub-machine gun.

Wednesday, May 18th

Safehouse F

It was time for me to get out into the City of Chicago and reacquaint myself with the changes which had occurred while I had been in Europe.

Most importantly, I wanted to meet the new vigilantes and try to figure out what they were about. There was the female one, Sunset Phoenix, in her dazzling costume, and then there was the new duo who had appeared on the streets but had otherwise kept to the shadows. I was also more than a little worried by the ‘gift’ which Foxtail had brought me on Monday night.

The bitch just walked up to me in the galley and dumped the sub-machine gun onto the table! I was more than a little annoyed, but I understood the significance of the weapon instantly. I thanked the girl with a few choice words and while she and Lauren changed, I listened to what had occurred that night. I was impressed with Lauren, and with Saoirse’s tactics for training Nightmare.

That night, I geared up with Erika and Megan for the night's activities. The three of us were quite speedy with our armour so that we could leave Saoirse and Stephanie to their decidedly animated discussion on locker privacy and the use of insecure lock combinations.

Those two were always bitching at each other, but the two of them were like sisters and they would never hurt one another – well, not seriously at least.

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I checked in with the Command Centre and the three of us signed out for the night. Wildcat's motorcycle was down for the night, so she would ride with Mist on her Streetfighter 848. I was overjoyed as I swung my left leg over my pride and joy. The purple Panigale Superbike felt like home between my legs.

"Hit Girl is up."

"Mist is up."

"Wildcat is up."

"Good hunting, girls," Battle Guy acknowledged as the large vehicle access door opened.

Hit Girl with Mist and Wildcat

Apart from some friendly waves and beeping horns, we didn't find much in the first hour.

But then things began to warm up nicely. We were on South Archer Avenue and headed northeast when something caught my eye just as we crossed South Looms Street. I slammed on my brakes and came to a smoky halt, much to the enjoyment of some young boys on the street corner. Mist did the same and she followed me as I turned around and accelerated up West Fuller Street. We passed under the Stevenson Expressway and the railroad before we emerged into a quiet residential neighbourhood.

Up ahead, I saw a flash of pink vanish around a bend in the road. We followed but instead of finding the expected Sunset Phoenix, we found something *completely* different and very new. As I pulled up on my purple Ducati Panigale, Mist nodded to one side where there sat a large and very powerful motorcycle in metallic black and plasma blue.

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The Kawasaki Z1000SX Tourer had been customised but it was otherwise easily recognisable as a beautiful piece of engineering. I pulled off my helmet and climbed off the Ducati as did Mist and Wildcat who was on the back of her Streetfighter.

We moved towards the Kawasaki just as a shape appeared out of the shadows.

"Well, hello, Hit Girl..."

The person who emerged from the shadows wore armour, just as we did. They were armed too. As they came closer, I identified the armoured individual as being female.

"What the *fuck* are you?" I asked with obvious and intended disdain in my tone.

"I – am – FEAR..."

Three simple words.

“What?”

“I am here to fuck up your life, Hit Girl.”

“Forgive me if I don’t shit myself...”

“You think you can fight me, right here, right now?” FEAR demanded. “Without your little friends...”

“I’ll fuck her up!” Wildcat yelled.

FEAR turned towards the ever fearless younger vigilante.

“Control yourself, Wildcat; I’ll be trimming *your* claws, next...”

“Bring it on...”

I raised my hand and Wildcat fell silent.

“What she said...” I growled.

FEAR reached over her left shoulder with her right hand and removed her melee weapon. The war sword was a little over three feet in length, with the blade being a little under two feet. It was a lethal weapon and from what I could see, she knew how to wield it.

I drew my own twin Katanas.

Mist with Wildcat

The two women attacked each other and Wildcat wisely jumped out of the way before she was trampled.

Hit Girl’s black, dark grey, and purple armour complemented FEAR’s black and red armour and it proved easy to track each of the women as they span. Their swords clashed in the darkness. We tried not to watch. Our job was to keep a good lookout out for anybody who might make an attempt to take advantage of the fight. Wildcat seethed over her cold put down. I soothed her with some words that I hoped might help. Otherwise, I prepared my Sai and chain whip for action and I advised Wildcat to do the same with her own weapons.

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Hit Girl appeared to have no issues with fighting a woman a few inches taller than herself, as well as one that was bulkier. The war sword was also a heavier weapon, but Hit Girl had state of the art swords, herself, and they stood up to the abuse from the larger weapon quite well. I enjoyed watching sword play and it was rare for me to see two obvious professionals duelling it out. It was even rarer to see Hit Girl facing off against somebody who could fight almost as well as she could.

I kept an eye on the fight, the surrounding area, and of course, Wildcat. The tetchy eleven-year-old vigilante paced from side to side, her Wakizashi in her right hand and every now and then, she would deploy and retract the claws in her left gauntlet.

“Easy, young one,” I said quietly. “It will be your turn, soon enough.”

Wildcat just growled in response to my comment.

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As was usual, Hit Girl used her agility to stay one step beyond the sharp tip of the war sword; jumping and flipping as required. FEAR, or whatever she called herself, was just as agile and she sidestepped or jumped out of the way of Hit Girl's twin Katana blades. The clang of steel upon steel had brought a small audience of Chicagoans from the nearby residential neighbourhood. Naturally, they yelled their support for Hit Girl.

FEAR did not seem to like that but she continued to fight as the duel moved steadily towards where Wildcat and I were waiting.

Hit Girl

The new girl in town certainly knew how to fight and we seemed to be fairly evenly matched.

I hated having an audience, but I could tolerate it. We both paused for a few seconds and circled each other as we caught our breaths.

"You having fun, yet?" I growled at the armour clad woman. She smiled from beneath her cowl-style mask.

"I suppose. Fighting the famous Hit Girl *is* a bit of a thrill. Mind you, I thought that she would have been better..."

"I'm not at my best, right now . . . or you would already be a corpse," I retorted evenly. "However, if you want me at 100%, I'm sure that I can ramp it up."

While we talked, I noticed Wildcat move closer, with Mist only a short distance behind. Wildcat took a swipe at FEAR with the claws of her left gauntlet . . . but to my surprise, they did little more than scratch FEAR's armour. Wildcat seemed stunned at the first ever failure of her claws.

"Oh, dear," FEAR laughed. "Did the little kitty's claws fail?"

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FEAR struck out at the stunned vigilante and Wildcat received an armoured gauntlet to the head which sent her spinning to the ground. I moved in to cover the fallen Wildcat and I struck with both of my blades. One was blocked while the other connected with FEAR's armour on her shoulder. She grunted with the impact but she did not seem to be hurt in any way. I fought back what was probably the same feeling that Wildcat had had when her claws had failed to penetrate the bitch's armour.

Said bitch had obviously done her homework and she had been able to obtain armour that our weapons could not easily penetrate. There was a resounding crack as Mist's chain whip struck FEAR's armour near her left shoulder and the bitch lost her balance for a moment before she steadied herself and turned towards her attacker.

Mist struck again as an infuriated Wildcat struck with her Wakizashi.

Wildcat

I was livid and I was *not* about to let FEAR leave.

I wanted her hide and I was going to nail it to the proverbial barn door. I was incensed at the apparent failure of my claws. While Hit Girl attacked from one side and Mist pulled her whip back, I lunged at FEAR. I launched myself into the air where I struck her square in the upper back with the soles of both boots. At the same time as she fell forwards, I struck out with my Wakizashi and saw blood erupt from her left lower leg. FEAR turned her fall into a forward roll and she quickly regained her feet. She took the opportunity to very quickly disengage from the fight and she ran for her motorcycle.

"Let her go," Hit Girl ordered.

We did just that and the crowd exploded into cheers.

Forty minutes later

Safehouse F

Megan/Wildcat

Mindy did not look happy when she removed her mask.

However, she turned to me as I removed my own mask and she smiled.

"Well done, you did well," Mindy looked over at Erika. "You too, Erika."

"Loved the curtsy, Megan!" Erika chuckled.

"I had an audience..."

Joshua came running up to help us with our equipment. He smirked at Megan as he helped her remove her sword.

"That curtsy was very elegant, Megan. I thought only little girls and ladies curtsied. Surprised you even knew how."

"Oh, Megan used to do the cutest curtsies when she was little," Paige commented from the walkway.

"I *am* a girl; you know..."

"Yeah, those beautiful tits kinda give you away," Curtis laughed and there was much laughter at Megan's expense.

"Flattery is a girl's best friend..." Megan grinned before she gave Curtis a deep kiss.

"Was that a tongue?" Stephanie demanded of nobody in particular.

The next morning

Thursday, 19th May

The home of Avery Lee

Holy fuck!

I just figured it all out – it was like a bright flash of light inside my head as everything became remarkably clear. Along with the revelation also came questions – disturbing questions.

Should I say something to her?

Would she kill me?

I could not wait to get to school...

Later that morning

Lake View High School

It took a while for me to get the nerve to ask.

“Chloe?”

“Yeah, Avery.”

“We’ve been friends a long time, right?”

“Of course; the best.”

“Would you ever, you know, hurt me?”

Chloe looked up from her magazine with confusion on her face and I bit my lip.

“Can we go somewhere a little more private...”

Chloe nodded and we walked outside where we found a quiet corner.

“I know what you are . . . please don’t kill me.” I said the last bit quickly.

Chloe blinked at me and raised an eyebrow.

“I have no idea *what* you are talking about...”

I leaned in close and whispered into her ear.

“I can’t believe that I’ve slept with Shadow!”

It had to happen someday.

“For God’s sake, Avery! You didn’t sleep with me – we just played . . . we were barely thirteen, for fuck’s sake.”

“So . . . so you admit it?”

“I can neither confirm nor deny said accusation...”

“Horseshit, Chloe! I knew that was you at the bank and since...”

That was when Chloe scared the living daylights out of me . . . she *growled*.

“You say anything to anybody and a lot of people may die – including you... You understand me, Scout!”

I knew that Scout Avery Lee *hated* her given first name and by the fact that I had invoked it I hoped I would show how serious I was.

“Don’t *ever* call me that!” she hissed angrily.

“Then I’d better not catch you calling me Shadow, *ever* – period!”

I trusted Avery, I had to – although her mouth tended to get her into trouble at times. As per protocol, I notified Mindy that somebody had figured out Shadow’s secret identity.

That evening

Western Chicago

Hit Girl

After our little run in with FEAR, I was back out on the streets.

I wanted payback and so did my little friend.

“I am *not* little!” Wildcat had growled as Jackal had passed over her helmet.

It had been a while since it had just been Hit Girl and Wildcat. The younger vigilante was astride her Ducati Hypermotard SP and surprisingly, she was keeping very quiet. I knew that the young girl still silently seethed over her failed attack with her claws the previous evening. I had tried to assuage her worries but to no avail.

We stopped at a convenient doughnut shop and we chatted with the occupants of two CPD cruisers while they whiled away their nightshift. The CPD enjoyed chatting with *Fusion*, especially the younger members and they were very complimentary about Wildcat. I could tell by her stance that she was embarrassed but obviously thankful for her mask.

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It was while we were there that we hit pay dirt. I saw pink! We both dived after the garishly clad vigilante – at least I assumed that she was a vigilante.

She was a fast runner but her suit and the hair which was primarily red with yellow highlights easily gave away her position in the semi-darkness. She ran towards a cheap motel a hundred yards or so away at the other end of the block. We both ran after the pink woman and easily kept pace with her. We followed her up a flight of stairs and she dived through a partially open door.

Wildcat paused at the door and we both went in together. It was a seedy hotel room of the sort that cockroaches would steer well clear of. A man was on the floor where Sunset Phoenix had obviously knocked him as she had burst through his door. She was just a couple of feet away as we both launched ourselves at her.

Our momentum rolled us backwards and into the wall behind her.

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The wall exploded and the three of us fell into the next apartment.

I looked up to see two people on a bed – a man and a woman...

“Woah, they’re butt naked!” Wildcat commented inappropriately.

“Sorry – chasing . . . err – criminals...” I mumbled as I averted my eyes and I made for the window where a pair of pink boots were vanishing.

“That is one *enormous* di...”

“Move it Wildcat!” I ordered as I seized the mesmerised *Fusion* Operator and dragged her to the window. “Get that man’s dick out of your mind.”

“Where else should I stick it?” Wildcat retorted as she climbed out of the window.

“You might just be a bit young for that, Wildcat!” I laughed as we landed on the fire escape beyond the window.

“That is *not* what I meant!” A flustered Wildcat replied.

Wildcat

I jumped the last half a dozen steps of the fire escape and then we both ran after the retreating Sunset Phoenix.

Despite my failure against the previous evening’s adversary, Sunset fucking Phoenix was going down – period! I did not think much of her garish colour scheme. The purple pizzazz was *waaaay* over the top – honestly... I was not sure what the hair reminded me of, but there was something and I could not quite grasp it in my mind.

I did, however, approve of the Tanto she carried on each thigh. The bitch could do with losing a few pounds off of those too... On her back was a lethal looking double-bladed ninja sword staff which, assuming the bitch could handle it, would be a dangerous object to fight against. I struggled to figure out how old the girl was.

In my mind, she did not seem old enough to be an adult – mid to late teens I assumed.

Sunset Phoenix

They were closing on me and as I took another look behind me, I fell.

As I clambered back to my feet, I was kicked backwards and I fell onto my back. Why I had been trying to run away from Hit Girl and Wildcat, I had no idea! We were in a dark alleyway and all I could really make out were the eyes that bored into my soul. The shorter of the two had dull green eyes while the taller had dull purple ones. Seeing just the eyes and the almost invisible outline of their armour freaked me out and I began to panic.

It took all my will power to force that panic down inside me.

Hit Girl with Wildcat

I could almost smell the fear that emanated from the fallen pink object before me.

There was defiance there. I could read her body language easily enough. I still had no idea if she was friend or foe. I took a chance.

“You really think that you can take me?”

“Of course,” came the brazenly indignant reply.

I almost laughed out loud but I had to give her kudos for the courage she was showing.

“Aw, come on – I don’t mean to brag or to boast, but I’m a six course meal and, well . . . you’re just burnt toast.”

The look I received in response to my proclamation was *not* friendly!

“Be off with you. Stay out of our business and I will leave you alone. Do you understand?” I growled.

“Yes, Hit Girl, I understand.”

The next day

Friday, 20th May

Lake View High School

“Why are you so giggly all of a sudden, Avery?” Riley enquired. “You and Chloe been fucking again?”

“We never fucked and you know that as *you* were there...” Avery retorted.

“Just kidding... Anyway, who are you fangirling over? You look like you just met your hero...”

Avery bit her lip and Riley scowled.

“Spill!” Riley ordered.

“I can’t – she’d kill me...”

“Stop talking crap – what have you done?”

“I know who Shadow really is...”

“Bullshit!”

“We *both* know her...”

Riley’s eyes went wide.

“You mean...”

“Uh, huh...”

“Holy, shit!”

“I know...”

“Does she know you know?”

“She does...”

That afternoon

"It's so awesome..." Avery stated.

"Tell me about it – *we know Shadow...*" Riley replied with a barely concealed squeal. "What... Sssh – here she comes!"

Riley and Avery tried to look innocent but failed. All day they had done their best to avoid Chloe with the feeblest of excuses.

"What is it with you two, today?" Chloe demanded.

"Nothing!" Avery replied a little too quickly.

That evening

West 18th Street

"I think we've pissed off Chloe – you think she knows I told you?"

"Dunno," Riley replied uneasily.

"Well, we're about to find out when we get to D-JAK..."

"She won't be there; she'll be at the big D-JAK – going to the old one to avoid her is just lame..."

Neither teen noticed the black panel van with the open side door as it cruised down the street. Neither teen noticed the two hooded people who followed them down the street until it was too late and they found themselves being grabbed and shoved into the passing van which then accelerated away.

The last thing that both girls saw were the hoods as they were pulled over their heads.