

Thursday, June 2nd, 2016

That evening

Safehouse F

I hated to leave my little girl when she was hurt but Dave was with her and she was safely tucked up in bed when I left.

As I climbed out of the XJR, I noticed something new affixed to the glass barricade. I moved forwards and began to read the sign. I felt my anger rise as I read but then it subsided as I began to laugh.

“You funny fuckers!” I yelled out.

“Problem, Boss?” Abby asked from beside the open section of the barricade.

“Hal!”

“See Marty...”

What had irked me so much? Marty had erected a warning sign – a sign warning everybody about *Hit Girl!*

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Fusion Management would like to make all visitors to Safehouse F aware of the following.

By continuing past this point, you indicate that you have read, understood, and agreed to the below and that you are fully aware that you may be at risk of:

Attack, mutilation, dismemberment, emasculation, torture, flaying, disembowelling, evisceration, decapitation, stabbing, or being shot without warning.

Possible weaponry in use may include explosive devices, projectiles (which can include, but may not be limited to: arrows, crossbow bolts, air gun pellets, bullets, shot, cannon balls, BBs, shrapnel, lasers, napalm, torpedoes, ICBMs, knives, stones, bricks, spit-wads, spears, javelins etc.) or emissions of electromagnetic radiation (such as radio waves, microwaves, infra-red radiation, visible light, invisible light, UV, X-rays, Alpha, Beta and Gamma rays, neutrons, neutrinos, positrons, N-rays etc.).

To significantly reduce the risks of exposure to, or injury from, any of the above, please ensure that Hit Girl has been suitably restrained before entry.

Please also be advised that while in the Safehouse, The Fusion Management cannot be held responsible for any injuries caused by any of the following:

Normal wear and tear, misuse, accident, lightning, flood, hail storm, tornado, tsunami, volcanic eruption, avalanche, earthquake or tremor, hurricane, solar activity, meteorite strike, nearby supernova and other Acts of God, Hit Girl, neglect, damage from improper or unauthorised use, incorrect line voltage, unauthorised repair, improper installation, typographical errors, broken antennae or marred cabinet, missing or altered serial numbers, electromagnetic radiation from nuclear blasts, microwave ovens or mobile phones, Hit Girl, sonic boom vibrations, ionising radiation, visitor or operator adjustments that are not covered in this list, and incidents owing to an airplane crash, ship sinking or taking on water, motor vehicle crashing, dropping of the item, falling rocks, leaky roof, Hit Girl, broken glass, disk failure, accidental file deletions, mud slides, forest fire, riots or other civil unrest, acts of terrorism or war, whether declared or not, Hit Girl, explosive devices or projectiles (which can include, but may not be limited to, arrows, crossbow bolts, air gun pellets,

bullets, shot, cannon balls, BBs, shrapnel, lasers, napalm, torpedoes, ICBMs, or emissions of electromagnetic radiation such as radio waves, microwaves, infra-red radiation, visible light, invisible light, UV, X-rays, Alpha, Beta and Gamma rays, neutrons, neutrinos, positrons, N-rays, knives, stones, bricks, spit-wads, spears, javelins etc.); other restrictions may apply.

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I was annoyed, but I knew that it was only meant in jest – at least I hoped so...

Either way, I changed into my combat suit and drew my weapons from the armoury. My partner for the evening was Shadow. We were both riding our Panigale Superbikes and it was not long before we broke out into the fresh night air and we headed east into Chicago.

I needed some action, something to get my teeth into.

East McFetridge Drive

I had no idea why we were there, only Battle Guy had been following Chicago's newest vigilantes.

As we rode east, we found nothing much to attract our attention or our wrath, which was a little disappointing, to say the least. I knew that Shadow was just as keen for some action as I was. She had not been out much since our return from Europe, so she was eager for anything that they could find. Just as I thought the night might be a bust, we found them.

The two vigilantes were engaged in a fist fight with what looked like some drunks. There were three men and a woman. Everyone appeared decidedly inebriated. On closer inspection, I saw two prone forms on the ground – the two kids were two up and going strong. Neither used their weapons; it was just a good old fist fight. Neither of the two vigilantes appeared to have noticed our arrival, and I had no desire to interrupt their fight nor to show them up. Instead, Shadows and I checked out the two motorcycles parked up a few yards away.

Others *had* noticed our arrival and they looked on in awe as we ignored all the looks and the flashing cameras. I was very impressed with their motorcycles – very cutting edge. Their combat suits matched their machines which seemed to work really well. They were both very well armed as you might expect for a vigilante. We parked our motorcycles beside theirs, dismounted, and then removed our helmets.

While we examined their motorcycles, the entire evening changed.

Hit Girl

“Well, hello, Hit Girl!” Sunset Phoenix offered in way of greeting. “I see you’ve brought your Shadow.”

I considered kicking the fuck out of the pink menace but I had an audience and to attack somebody who – so far – had not shown ill will towards anybody would, I decided, not be too good for my image... Yes, I was concerned about my image, what girl wasn't!

“Hello, Sunny – can we be of assistance?”

“Nah, just distracting you.”

I spun around just in time to see a group of men racing towards the young vigilantes whose attention was still very much on the drunks. I turned to yell at Sunset Phoenix, but she was gone.

“Fuck!” I growled.

Shadow

“Goddamn, bitch!” I added as I bolted forwards to intercept the men.

The men were armed with large batons and they looked like they meant business. The bottom half of their faces were covered with masks and they wore black gloves on their hands. Three headed towards the male vigilante known as Apollo and two towards the female vigilante known as Artemis. The remaining three spread out to cover their colleagues.

“Apollo, Artemis – check your six!” I yelled as I closed. My way was blocked by one of the men.

He swung his baton towards me and I dove to avoid the end which on closer inspection was barbed. My bō-staff clashed with the baton as I rose to my feet – the man was strong and his eyes sparkled. He obviously thought that I might be a push over – he was thinking with his balls and not his brain. Not a surprise with most men, even my own.

While I had the attentions of one idiot, Hit Girl was attacking the other two.

Two miles to the east

Jackal

“Jackal, Hal. Hit Girl and Shadow have contact and may require assistance.”

“Copy that. I’m on my way to rescue two beautiful ladies.”

I caught the laugh as Hal dropped the connection. My girl was in trouble so I accelerated down the street and headed towards the Lake. Plenty of heads turned as I sped past. Despite our seemingly overt activities in the city, we were still a sight that people were surprised to see on the streets. As I approached the scene of the action, I was surprised to see an audience cheering on *Fusion* and the other guys.

Hit Girl was fighting two large men – no surprise. My girl was attacking another man a few yards away from Hit Girl. Five men were attacking the two new vigilantes. They both seemed to be struggling under the onslaught, so I headed in that direction first. I stayed on my Tiger and as I rode past the vigilante called Apollo, I kicked out and sent one of his attackers flying into a street light. The man remained on the ground after he fell.

I parked my motorcycle beside the others and joined the fray.

Shadow

I almost laughed out loud as Jackal dodged the body which I had flung in his vague direction. The unconscious man crumpled to the street.

“Hey! What did I do to deserve that?” he growled.

“Nothing...”

“Bloody women!”

“Be nice, or you’ll join him.”

“In your dreams, Shadow!”

“When you two have finished your lovers’ tiff, could you actually do some work?” Hit Girl groused as she floored the second of the two men she had been fighting. He joined his colleague on the ground.

“Yes, ma’am, Hit Girl!” Jackal replied sincerely.

I chuckled and ran beside him towards Artemis.

Artemis

Things had got *slightly* out of hand.

The drunks had been easy, but then out of nowhere I had heard our names being yelled and I had turned to see a large group of men heading directly at us both. I also saw Hit Girl and Shadow heading in our direction. When had they arrived? Situational awareness was *not* our forte – we would need to work on that. The two *Fusion* members were blocked by more men.

I braced myself for the onslaught as two men made directly for me – three headed for my cousin. I quickly realised that I was out-matched. Each man had a long baton with what appeared to be a barbed tip. I dodged one, but felt the other strike my butt – it stung. I kicked backwards and sent one man flying but he regained his feet very quickly.

Okay, things had got *wildly* out of hand!

Apollo

We were both in the fight of our lives.

How they hell had we managed to let things go so bad and so sodding quickly. I could tell from my cousin’s voice that she was getting stressed and I knew that stress could lead to mistakes. I was not far off, to be honest with myself. The three men that I was fighting were very good. It was time to extricate ourselves and make our escape. I broke out of the fight with a swift kick to one masked opponents face. He yelled out in pain and I bolted for our motorcycles.

I made it and just had time to seize my bow from the motorcycle and nock an arrow as two men ran towards me.

Jackal

Why was everybody throwing bodies in my direction!

The male vigilante had just shot an arrow into one of the black-clad men and the body had narrowly missed me as it had fallen backwards with an arrow embedded firmly in the forehead.

“Nice!” I commented as I flipped a knife into the other cunt’s back and he fell inches away from the overwhelmed vigilante.

“Thank you, err, Jackal.”

“No problem, Apollo.”

I turned and ran after Shadow. She was pursuing another man who had decided it was better to run. Hit Girl was also in pursuit of her own man. Before I could close on Hit Girl, a third man made to intercept me but he seemed to have second thoughts as he got closer and he bolted after his colleagues with me a few feet behind.

Hit Girl

We were headed down past the docks when the men made a sharp left towards the docks.

We chased them down onto the piers. As we ran, I noticed the sign – ‘PIER E’ – I groaned as we ran past and between the boats moored on either side. I had a feeling that the bastards either had no idea where they were headed, or they had a boat waiting for them. Either way, they were going down.

Numerous boat owners poked their heads out to see what was going on, only to rapidly vanish the moment that they caught sight of little old purple me.

The men skidded to a halt, suddenly aware that they had taken a wrong turn.

There, right ahead of them at the end of the dock lay a large, sixty-five-foot yacht in white and light grey. They turned to find themselves faced with three very angry vigilantes. The vigilantes went at the men.

“What sick person would call a boat, ‘Salty Swallow’!” Jackal demanded, his statement dripping sarcasm as he smacked one cunt’s head against a convenient cleat.

“I have no idea...” Hit Girl growled back.

She angrily punched out another cunt’s lights.

“They gotta be a bit fucked up!” Shadow laughed as she dodged a kick and shoved her man hard against the hull of the yacht.

“Careful, bitch!”

The tone of the growl was ominous. Shadow grimaced and she dragged the man further down the dock before she pounded him into unconsciousness. Hit Girl walked up to Shadow and she stopped with her face just inches away from that of her lieutenant.

“If there is a single goddamn mark on that hull in the morning, you are polishing the whole goddamn boat from stem to stern!”

Shadow grinned.

That night

Glen Oak Drive

“You seemed to be having the time of your life, last Saturday.”

“Give it a rest, Morgan,” Saoirse replied firmly.

“Ethan seemed *very* hungry – I saw a few marks on your neck and you’ve been wearing high-necked tops since Sunday morning.”

“Ethan’s nice... He likes me.”

“He sure *liked* squeezing your boobs – but then you seemed to like it too...” Morgan laughed.

“Why are you torturing your poor little sister?”

“Just looking out for my *little* sister.”

“Okay,” Saoirse admitted reluctantly as her face went very red. “He *was* rather good with his hands...”

The next evening

Friday, June 3^d

Safehouse F

The CPD Lab had got back about the bombings.

It had taken a lot longer than expected due to what they had discovered. The forensic guys had found plenty of explosive residue which was not a surprise. But what *was* a surprise, was that the explosive residue had been extremely difficult to identify. They had been unable to find the expected chemical marker or taggant. Since 1988, almost all explosives carried a marker to aid in the identification of explosive batches. The lack of a marker had actually aided in the identification of the explosives. The explosive was identified as Semtex, a Czechoslovakian explosive much-favoured in the past by terrorists.

To be honest, Daddy had favoured Semtex and I still did to some extent. It could be used over a better range of temperatures than other plastic explosives and it was also waterproof. There was another problem with the detected explosive – it was old. All plastic explosives and most other explosives had a ‘shelf life’. Past a certain duration from date of manufacture the explosive would start to deteriorate. The effects could vary from the explosive becoming unstable and prone to accidental explosion, to not detonating when required.

The forensic guys had identified that the explosion could have been much worse, however, they also hinted at the precision that had gone into the siting of the explosives. No major damage was caused, just plenty of broken windows and shock value from the sound. In my own mind I had come to the conclusion that somebody had been trying to send a signal, a warning.

But warning of what?

The Briefing Room

Megan did not seem overly happy as Saoirse led her into the Briefing Room.

“We’ll go easy on you,” Stephanie offered.

“No,” Megan replied forcefully. “They need to learn.”

Saoirse turned to face the three Trainee Operators and she glared at each of them. Lauren looked worried, as did Danny. Anne-Marie seemed uncertain of how to react.

“Okay,” Saoirse began. “*Fusion* is a paramilitary organisation – what does that mean?”

The two eight-year-olds and the thirteen-year-old all looked blank.

“Your sodding education is shit!” Saoirse growled. “A paramilitary organisation is an organisation that is organised along the lines of a military force. Can you give me an example of that?”

Lauren brightened her expression as she replied.

“We have rank?”

“Well done, Nightmare!”

Lauren blushed but she smiled hugely as Anne-Marie clapped her on the back.

“Yes, we each wear rank on our uniforms. You three are Trainee Operators, Stephanie is a Junior Operator, while Megan and I are Operators. Those ranks create a structure of who gives orders and who obeys them *without question*. Why do we have a well-defined structure?”

This time Danny spoke up.

“Somebody has to make the decisions, otherwise nothing would get done.”

“Very good, Ravage.”

“Who is in charge of *Fusion*, right up at the top?”

“Mom!” Anne-Marie exclaimed happily with a smile in my direction. I rolled my eyes and tried to hide my smirk.

“What about Dad?” Saoirse pushed.

“He *always* does what Mom says,” Anne-Marie replied.

“Always?”

“Yep.”

“Why?”

“I heard him say that he likes Mom to be on top.”

My mouth dropped open and I felt really hot all of a sudden. Stephanie groaned and Megan laughed.

“More information than I was looking for, Rogue, but thanks,” Saoirse said quickly with a smirk in my direction. “Back to the lesson... Okay. We need a defined-structure to give clear orders. What might happen if somebody disobeyed orders?”

“They might get hurt a bit?” Lauren ventured.

“Exactly. Wildcat, if you please...”

Saoirse stepped back and she allowed Megan to step forwards. Megan was wearing a blue *Fusion* t-shirt and a pair of shorts. She held out her left arm with the inside of her elbow showing. Plainly visible to all was a pale white scar. She showed it to each of the trainees. Then, she proceeded to lift up her t-shirt and she showed them another pale white scar to the left of her belly-button. Finally, she pushed down the left side of her shorts to reveal yet another pale white scar on her left thigh.

“What were those?” Anne-Marie asked. She sounded worried – a sentiment seemingly shared by the other two kids.

“Those scars are the direct result of what happens when somebody disobey orders,” Megan said with all seriousness. She then pressed play on a remote control and sounds could be heard from the speakers in the briefing room.

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‘She’s running!’ It was the voice of Hit Girl.

There was a short pause during which some scuffling could be heard.

‘Stop!’ It was Wildcat.

‘Wildcat, no!’ Hit Girl again.

Several gunshots were heard, then a short scream – the scream of a young girl. Megan went very pale. Another pause.

‘Wildcat is down!’

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“That was almost exactly one year ago,” I explained as I stepped forwards. “I held the unconscious Wildcat in the back of Beast as we sped back here. Blood soaked her clothing and she had three knives embedded just where you saw those scars.”

“So that was what you meant about waking up in that bed in the Medical Center,” Stephanie said quietly.

“Yeah,” Megan replied. She had looked pained during the entire playback. She looked ashamed too.

Chloe walked into the briefing room.

“Mindy said Megan’s recording would be enough. I disagree, so here’s mine.”

With that she grabbed the remote from Megan and punched in a number. More sounds played.

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‘You!’ It was a man’s voice.

‘Yeah, and you have something of mine, you bastard!’ It was Shadow.

‘Come and fucking get it!’ The man’s voice again.

‘You D’Amico’s are fucking scum and you are the last of that line of evil villainy!’ Shadow again.

A short pause with sounds of action.

'Kick-Ass, D'Amico has run back towards the apartment block, with three of his men.' Hit Girl.

Another pause, and then the voice of Hit Girl.

'Shadow, stop!'

'No, I'm gonna get that bastard!' Shadow replied angrily.

'Wait for me. You can't take him alone.'

'Fuck you, Hit Girl! He shot me and almost killed him... I want the bastard!'

'Shadow...'

'Shadow...'

Finally, after a short gap, there was a scream. A girl's scream.

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Lauren and Stephanie had their hands over their mouths in stunned disbelief. Saoirse was wide-eyed and so were the twins. Chloe looked over at me soberly and I smiled back at her. I vividly remembered the events that followed.

"Any questions on obeying orders?" Saoirse enquired of the very sober trainees.

There were none.

The following afternoon

Saturday, June 4th

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

I hated hospitals at the best of times.

I also hated to see kids in hospital. Only this time, it was my team that had put them there. Or more precisely it was the morose teenager walking alongside of me down the long corridor. I knew that my best friend had had no choice at the time but she still hated herself for having had to put the two girls down.

I trained my operators to know the best places to strike on the human body to put an opponent down quickly and permanently. Chloe had used that training to help her avoid anything vital. She had done her very best not to mortally wound them both and thankfully for all concerned, she had succeeded. We paused outside the private room in the east wing and I turned to Chloe.

"Chloe, they have no idea that we were even there. They are both alive and that is all that matters."

"I suppose..."

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I pushed open the door and we both walked into the room. There were two beds evident and they were placed side by side with a two-foot gap in between. In each bed lay a girl – at first glance, it appeared as if the same girl lay in each bed, but I knew better. They were twins.

“Good afternoon, my name is Mindy and this is Chloe. We represent the Central Intelligence Agency,” I said as we both offered our CIA credentials.

Yes, Chloe and I were official CIA Contractors as were other members of Fusion. The identity cards had arrived the previous week. In the case of the two girls, it would allow us to talk with them without exposing ourselves as *Fusion*.

“Okay,” the girl on the left offered dubiously.

“Sky, isn’t it?” I enquired and the girl nodded.

“Which makes you, Christina,” I said looking at the other girl.

“I prefer Chrissy, if you don’t mind.”

“Okay, Chrissy. We are not the part of the CIA who did this to you.”

“It was that *Fusion* bitch that did this to us,” Chrissy commented savagely. “Not the CIA.”

I felt Chloe tense up and I rested a hand on her arm.

“That *Fusion* ‘bitch’, as you call her, did everything that she could to stop you both without killing you. Would you have preferred to have died?” I demanded.

Sky looked at her sister before she replied.

“No . . . of course not. We just want a chance to get our lives back.”

“I know. That is why we are here. You were both with *Urban Predator* for many years. It will be difficult to get used to life in the real world, but that is what we want to help you with. As I understand it, you will both need another couple of weeks in the hospital and then we can move you to somewhere a little more comfortable for the rest of recuperation.”

“What will happen to us?” Chrissy asked.

“Once you are both deemed one-hundred percent fit, then whatever you want.”

“We can go anywhere?” Sky pushed.

“Within reason. You are both almost sixteen, so you would still need adult supervision. We’ll figure something out for that in due course.”

“Thank you. We were kinda thinking that we had been abandoned,” Sky commented.

“You are not alone. Any problems, you give me a call.”

That evening

Safehouse F

“Nightmare, Rogue, Ravage! Front and centre!”

None of the kids had any idea about what was about to happen, so naturally they looked very worried as they approached the notoriously unpredictable Hit Girl. She smiled at them as they stood before her in an attempt to put them at ease. She raised her right hand and fanned out three dark blue access cards. All three kids smiled at the sight of those cards. They were finally getting their

much coveted access cards. To that point, none of them had been able go very far within the Safehouse without escort.

“Let’s begin with the most infuriating one of the three,” Hit Girl began and Rogue smiled enormously. “Rogue. While you are still very much a Trainee Operator, Foxtail, Psyche, and the Senior Staff have all had a lapse of sanity and they have decided that you deserve your own access card. It won’t get you very far, but at least it should stop your persistent nagging.”

Rogue grinned and her face went pink with embarrassment as Hit Girl pushed the access card into the young girl’s shaking hand and everybody cheered. Once the noise had died down, Hit Girl turned to Ravage.

“Congratulations, Ravage. Despite the antics of your sister, you have excelled in everything that Foxtail and Psyche have thrown at you. You kept a level head in France, despite your having never been in such a situation before. Well done, Ravage.”

Another wave of applause accompanied the access card as Ravage beamed his happiness around the room. Then, as silence once again descended on the room, Hit Girl turned her attention to the taller and older Trainee Operator.

“What are we going to do about you, young lady?” Hit Girl mused. “You’ve accomplished much since you’ve been with us, Nightmare.”

Nightmare seemed very unsure of herself and she looked a little worried as Hit Girl handed her the blue card. Nightmare looked down at the card and then she frowned.

“Is there a problem, Nightmare?” Hit Girl enquired gently.

“Why is my card different?”

“Athena, might you step forward and advise your daughter as to why her card is different.”

Athena, otherwise known as Nightmare’s mother, stepped forwards with a big grin on her face. She stopped beside Hit Girl and then smirked at her worried daughter.

“You seem to have made waves, Nightmare. You seem to have impressed Foxtail *and* Psyche – no easy feat, I understand. You are being promoted to *Senior* Trainee Operator.”

Nightmare looked stunned at the news. Athena proceeded to remove the inverted ‘V’ insignia from her daughter’s collar and she replaced it with a single vertical brass bar which matched that on her access card.

