

That night
Friday, August 12th, 2016

Kilbourn Avenue

It was Abby's birthday – she was sixteen, just like her friends.

"I look back over the past few years and I'm shocked as hell to find myself still alive and with my best friends. When Chloe first entered my life, she was morose and she needed a shoulder to cry on – I was happy to provide that. I liked Chloe – okay, she was weird, always going on about this awesome guy called *Joshua* . . ."

"I can't help being awesome," Joshua interrupted. Abby and Chloe both laughed.

". . . Chloe was pretty much my only real friend – being a geek kinda kept me on my own. Then I found out she was a wannabe vigilante, called Shadow. I warned her – but since when did Chloe Bennett *ever* listen to anybody; least of all when she was thirteen. I would cover for her – every night that she went out. Then she had to go and get herself shot which meant she was rescued by the Dynamic Duo. . ."

"Dynamic Duo?" Joshua echoed.

"An apt description," Chloe laughed.

". . . The best thing I ever did was follow Chloe and find out where she'd been going. I will admit, having Hit Girl's arm across my throat scared me half to death, but our adventures, together, have been the best – thanks, both of you, for making my life the best ever," Abby finished.

"Happy Birthday!" Joshua and Chloe exploded.

The next evening
Saturday, August 13th

D-JAK

"Why do I get the job of shutting everything up?"

"Tommy, you work here."

"It's a shit job. Maybe Mindy hates me."

"Nah – she's just a bitch!" Joshua replied with a chuckle.

Tommy laughed and he went back to collecting the abandoned jō-staffs and other detritus left over from a long day of martial-arts classes. Twenty minutes later, Tommy was almost done with his chores and Joshua was close to completing his own. Then, totally unexpectedly, the lights went out in the studio.

"What the hell?" Tommy demanded as the emergency lights snapped on around the space.

An indignant, accusing voice called out from the opposite side.

"What did you do?"

"Nothing!" Tommy replied just as indignantly.

“He’s right. It was us.”

“Who the *fuck* are you?” Tommy demanded.

“Забывтый нас так быстро, молодой Фома?” *{Forgotten us so quickly, young Thomas?}*

Tommy felt a cold chill as he heard the Russian words and instantly translated them in his head.

“Александр. . .” *{Alexander. . .}*

“Who the fuck are you talking to, Tommy?” Joshua called as he walked over.

“I am talking to the bastard who slashed my chest. He’s called Alexander.”

“So a bad fucker, then?”

“Yeah. Three against one, is not exactly fair, Alexander.”

“No, it is not, Thomas.”

“You expect me to give up and just hand myself over?”

“Oh, no, Tommy. I have far too much respect for you to expect that.”

“До смерти!” *{To the death!}*

“I would expect nothing less from a boy like you. . .”

“What did you just say?” Joshua demanded.

“I said that we would fight to the death,” Tommy replied conversationally.

“I figured that,” Joshua replied dryly as he flexed his muscles.

“You take those two – Alexander is mine,” Tommy directed.

“Great – give me the two large Russian cunts – thank you, Tommy; you go play with your pal.”

There was no response from Tommy as he bolted for his nemesis.

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“Where the fuck are they – eight o’clock, on the fucking dot, they said!”

“Calm down, Chloe – maybe they’re busy.”

“Fucking boys!”

“Your favourite past time!” Stephanie giggled.

“I luck to fuck, yeah – just one boy, though . . . dammit! Let’s go find them.”

With that, Stephanie and Chloe left the Mini parked at the side of the street and headed towards the main doors into D-JAK. They were half-way up the stairs when they heard fighting – normally a usual activity for D-JAK; only the place was closed with only Joshua and Tommy in residence. Both girls stopped dead and exchanged glances while Stephanie reached down to her left ankle and she produced a micro-compact Kel-Tec P3AT .38-calibre pistol.

“Where’s yours,” she hissed.

“In the car. . .” Chloe replied as Stephanie just shook her head in disgust.

“Amateur!”

Stephanie went first, pistol held out in her left hand. At the top of the stairs, Chloe moved to the left, heading for the lights, while Stephanie covered her movements in the darkness. By the light which filtered in through the windows from the street poles, Stephanie could make out five people fighting. She readily recognised the smallest silhouette as Tommy.

Stephanie closed her eyes as Chloe raised her thumb in the air. A second later, the lights began to snap on down the studio, dazzling all who still had their eyes open. Unfortunately, that included Joshua and Tommy, as well as their opponents. All were momentarily dazzled, but only for a moment. Chloe dashed in and attacked the closest enforcer while Stephanie ran towards Tommy.

“Hey, I was handling them!” Joshua growled as he saw Chloe join the party.

“Got bored waiting downstairs, so I decided to come see what you boys . . . hold on . . .” Chloe powered her right fist into the Russian’s temple as he went down to his knees, putting him out on the ground. “. . . were doing up here.”

“Thanks,” Joshua breathed as his man’s nose exploded as Joshua double-tapped his face with his fists and then followed up with a powerful punch to his jaw. The man quickly joined his pal on the ground.

They both turned towards Tommy who was exchanging blows with a tall, thin man. Tommy’s face was full of hate as he struck repeatedly at his opponent. Stephanie closed, looking for a shot, but Tommy clocked her and he shook his head – Stephanie frowned but lowered her pistol a fraction.

“I owe you, Alexander; I want to see you bleed.”

“My dear, Thomas, you were made to bleed as punishment for your behaviour; you had to learn to follow simple instructions, мальчик.” {boy}

“I was sick of fighting for your warped entertainment. . .”

“You were one of my best.”

The blows flew despite the words which also flew back and forth. Stephanie looked over at Chloe and Joshua for guidance, both shrugged – it was Tommy’s fight. But before any decision could be made, there was the sound of feet on the stairs and then two objects span across the floor.

“Grenade!” Stephanie yelled.

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The double-explosion stunned the three youngsters and they each fell to the floor. Alexander was also stunned by the sudden flashes and resounding bangs. As the five of them staggered back to their feet, Alexander was seized by two men and dragged off down the stairs. Two further men retrieved their fallen comrades.

It was several more minutes before Stephanie, Chloe, and Joshua were able to see and hear properly. Stephanie clocked the cracked windows and winced and the thought of how Mindy might react to her flagship studio suffering damage. They did not have long to wait as several CPD officers quickly appeared. The surge up the stairs was led by Sergeant Murphy who quickly took charge and secured the premises but the Russians were long gone.

Stephanie's pistol and ankle holster had also mysteriously vanished – nobody noticed the addition to Murphy's armoury. Thirty minutes later, a worried looking Mindy raced up the steps and she grabbed hold of Stephanie, hugging her tightly.

"I'm fine!" Stephanie growled.

"I was so worried when Murphy called – are you all okay?"

"Yeah," Chloe confirmed.

"It was Alexander," Tommy explained, a look of intense anger on his face. "I want him."

"We'll get him – I promise you, Tommy," Mindy confirmed.

"Sorry about the glass," Stephanie offered meekly.

"Fuck that!" Mindy retorted. "If anything happened to any of you. . ."

"She really cares," Joshua commented with a hint of surprise in his tone.

"Maybe she's softening in her old age," Chloe added with a smirk.

Mindy just scowled at her two best friends.

The following morning
Sunday, August 14th

Glenview

It was the beginning of the usual raft of crap anniversaries.

The time wasn't helped by the attack the previous evening. Mindy was not overly surprised – the '60-day' mark of their deadline had passed just that Tuesday and she had expected an attack; just nothing that personal.

"What's going on?" Stephanie asked as she came into the kitchen for breakfast. She could sense the tension as Dave sat at the counter, staring at his full cup of coffee as Mindy hugged him.

Dave turned to face his eldest daughter, just as Anne-Marie and Danny appeared – they both stopped dead as they saw the sadness in Dave's face.

"Sorry, guys – no smiles this morning," he explained. "It's been three years since my Dad died. He was murdered in New York, on the orders of The Motherfucker. The worst of it is that it was my fault; if I had given up being Kick-Ass. . ."

"Dave," Mindy warned.

"Sorry – I just get really morose around this time of year. Marty will be too – he was there when I found out. Next week will be the third anniversary of us taking down The Motherfucker in New York – it will also be the anniversary of Mindy leaving New York. . ."

Dave stopped speaking as all three kids ran over to hug him tightly.

The next day
Monday, August 15th

D-JAK

All of the damaged glazing had been repaired and all was back to normal.

Stephanie, though, sensed that something was off – but she could not put her finger on what it was until she confronted Mindy.

“What’s going on?”

“You have a visitor, Steph,” Mindy explained cryptically.

“Who?”

Nobody answered the ten-year-old so she went back to the mat and practicing with her right arm. It was still very painful, but she was coping. She couldn’t raise her right arm above her shoulder, but it was still very early days. Stephanie did her best to exercise all of her other muscles which had languished during her time in the hospital. Those muscles included her legs which were as trim as ever, but Stephanie knew that her muscles and ligaments were not in peak condition. Training was not easy with one painful arm held across her stomach, but Lauren and Megan provided as much assistance as they could.

Stephanie paused to sit down and drink a can of Coke just as some people arrived. Stephanie was very surprised to see Cassie of all people walking towards her. Dave was with her, and just behind Dave was a short girl of maybe nine-years-old. All sorts of emotions shot through Stephanie’s mind as she studied the girl who had slowed her approach and showed caution as she came closer. Stephanie never said a word as the nine-year-old studied her. However, Stephanie shocked everybody as she stepped forwards and then she slapped the girl on the cheek.

“Whoa!” Cassie announced.

“No harm done,” Electra announced as she rubbed her cheek. “Not bad, Steph!”

“You’re lucky that I’m a lot weaker than I usually am.”

“Yes – I heard about your injury – I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. . .”

With that, the two girls hugged and tears were visible in two sets of eyes.

“You two gonna put on a show?” Megan enquired with a cheeky grin.

Neither girl said anything as they released each other and exchanged a glance. Next thing, they both kicked out and Megan fell backwards with a little scream. Stephanie held out her right hand, palm up, and Electra brought her own right hand down hard onto Stephanie’s.

“Right on, partner!” Stephanie growled as she winced with the pain.

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“Where? How? When?”

Stephanie was full of questions as the two girls sat down in private on the couch in Mindy’s office.

“Cassie’s Dad picked me up off a French merchantman, a few weeks back. I escaped the massacre at Milan and found myself in bad company. If I hadn’t been rescued from the French. . .”

“It’s really good to see you, Electra – I’ve missed you, kid.”

“I’ve missed you, Steph.”

Both girls hugged again and real tears fell as the two girls considered their shared past.

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“What do we know about Electra?” Cassie asked.

“She was what they called a ‘yellow’ – somebody of no consequence, apparently. According to Stephanie, yellows dealt with the shit quite literally. They controlled *Predators* under punishment and were given mundane jobs that were deemed to be beneath *Predator* status. Most never reached their eight birthdays and were ‘disposed of’ as part of the identity reassignment part of the *Predator* training,” Abby explained as she read the text on her tablet. “Electra, though, she became a *Predator* thanks to Stephanie, it seems. Somebody in *Urban Predator* saw something in the girl, or maybe they were just fucking with Stephanie. Either way, both girls owe their lives to each other. It scares me seeing kids so young and knowing what they went through. She’s a geek for fuck’s sake – it says so in her notes. She’s someone like me.”

“I know, Abby, I do,” Mindy said as soothingly as she could.

Not much got Abby riled up, but *Urban Predator* was one of them.

“You go check on them,” Mindy suggested.

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Stephanie and Electra were talking animatedly when Abby knocked then pushed open the office door.

“Are you two okay?” she asked.

“Yeah, Abby, thanks,” Stephanie replied.

“You weren’t recruited as a *Predator*, were you, Electra?” Abby asked.

“They took me. I was stripped, prodded, poked – then they realised I needed glasses and I was canned. Well, actually, I was ‘yellowed’ – the next thing I knew, I was showered, then I was given some yellow clothing to wear. I was only seven; I had no idea what was going on. I spent my first couple of weeks cleaning out buckets of piss. Then they promoted me to The Cage. My job was to strip the *Predators* under punishment, feed them – if they deserved it, and make sure they drank and stayed alive.”

“That sounds like shit,” Abby commented.

“It was – but then I met Steph. . .”

“I taught her to fight, to protect herself – some fucking instructor latched onto that and decided to use her to get to me,” Stephanie added.

There was a knock on the door and Stephanie smiled as Saoirse entered.

“I heard we’d another *Predator* – hi, I’m. . .”

“I remember you, Saoirse,” Electra growled, ignoring Saoirse’s hand.

Saoirse paused and Stephanie was confused.

“You made Stephanie’s life hell – I saw you slap her backside, that day she was strapped in the dining room. You’re a nasty bitch, Saoirse – stay the fuck away from me.”

“lectra. . .” Stephanie tried.

“No, Steph, I can’t be friends with somebody like her – I’m sorry.”

Electra stepped out of the office and went to watch the sparring. Saoirse looked to be almost in tears as she sat down in a vacant chair.

“I know I was bad – and yes, I did slap your bare ass straight after that strapping; I regret that, I really do.”

“You were different then,” Stephanie tried. “You’re not that girl anymore. Same as I was different back then; you know how people react when they first meet me.”

“Now I know how it feels to be in your shoes – it sucks.”

“She’ll come around in her own time, SD – I’m sure of it.”

That night

Marquette Park

The Lockheed L-100 Hercules was cruising at 145 knots; landing speed. The aircraft was lined up for runway 31-Right and losing altitude as it sank towards the runway.

Then, just five nautical miles out, the inner starboard engine exploded. A thousand feet below, on the ground, Hit Girl froze as the aircraft hurtled towards her. She had turned at the noise, expecting to see an aircraft passing overhead as it took-off, or landed, at Chicago Midway International Airport.

Instead, the sight was mesmerising.

“Raptor! Raptor! Raptor!”

Safehouse F

Command Centre

The codewords echoed out of all the speakers in the Command Centre and Abby went pale as she recognised Hit Girl’s voice.

The three code words were designed especially for a vigilante in life-threatening trouble that they could not escape from. The phrase was instigated after both Mindy and Chloe had gotten themselves jammed up in a fucked-up Bank Heist.

“What’s up, Boss?” Abby enquired, dreading to hear what would make Hit Girl call the ball.

“An aircraft is about to hit, Hit Girl,” Hit Girl announced in an even tone.

Abby looked over at Marty who just shrugged.

"I think she's lost it . . . big time," Abby commented.

"Maybe not. . ." Marty threw back, as the image from a security camera on a nearby building appeared on one of the large screens.

"Shit!" Abby breathed.

That same night

Marquette Park

Hit Girl pulled herself out of her frozen state and she looked around her.

There were people: men, women, and children. The collateral damage would be huge. She ran forwards and began to yell for everybody to *MOVE*. Hit Girl resorted to some foul language and firing her pistol in the air to motivate people. Every second of delay meant death was a second closer. The roar of the remaining three Allison 501-D331 turboprops was getting louder and louder as they came closer and closer.

"Get out of there, Hit Girl!" Kick-Ass yelled over the comms.

"I can't leave anybody to be killed. . ."

"Dammit!" Kick-Ass responded from the Safehouse.

Hit Girl was out of time as the aircraft pointed directly at her and the south-west portion of the park. Hit Girl ran towards a small boy who was paralysed with fear as he watched impending doom approach at over 100 knots. At the last minute, Hit Girl swept the boy up and she buried herself into the grass, her back armour towards the inbound seventy-tonne aircraft.

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The roar of the impact was spectacular as the reinforced aluminium structure struck the grass just to the south of Redfield Drive. The aircraft remained intact as it smashed three cars out of the way and shot across the lagoon before ploughing into a large sand trap on the golf course. Hit Girl's hearing was inhibited as the roar of engines and twisted metal blocked out even her communications and the screams of the small boy.

Then there was an eerie reduction in the sound, almost to silence. The reinforced radome of the Hercules aircraft was literally an inch from her left arm when it finally came to a halt. Of the four, four-bladed, propellers, one was still spinning wildly despite no sound coming from the engine behind. Hit Girl checked the small boy that she had shielded – he was shaking with fear, but he was alive and unhurt. Hit Girl checked her own armour and body to find herself just as alive and unhurt.

Hit Girl yelled out as an electronic pulse sounded in her earpiece.

"Okay, I'm alive!" she yelled out.

Safehouse F

Kick-Ass had never been happier as he ran for Hound.

“Ambulances are rolling,” Abby confirmed. “Petra is on scene and searching for Hit Girl.”

“Any idea what the aircraft is?” Stephanie asked.

“I’m just obtaining the callsign from Air Traffic Control and then we’ll know. . . got it . . . that’s weird,” Marty replied.

“Well?” Stephanie prompted.

“Callsign: JUSTICE – only, JPATS don’t use L-100s; they use 737s and DC-9s.”

“I smell a rat,” Stephanie said. “If it involves Chicago and Hit Girl, plus it looks odd – then it’s probably an attack.”

“She’s good,” Marty chuckled. “She has her Mom right down.”

Marquette Park

Hit Girl handed the small boy off to a CPD officer and she moved to the rear of the aircraft, looking for survivors.

She was shocked to find orange-suited men bailing out of the aircraft en masse.

“Battle Guy, I have fucking inmates pouring out of this aircraft!”

“Err, yeah – it’s flagged as a JPATS flight, but there’s something off about it, according to the little runt,” Battle Guy replied.

Hit Girl smiled at his reference to Stephanie.

“What’s JPATS,” Petra asked as she appeared behind Hit Girl.

“Justice Prisoner and Alien Transportation System,” Psyche cut in from the Safehouse.

“Brighter than she looks,” Petra chuckled.

“Bite me, Petra!”

“Shouldn’t we be stopping them?” Petra asked, ignoring the power-crazed vigilante in the Safehouse.

“Yeah,” Hit Girl said as she grabbed the nearest orange-suited inmate. “It’s a fucking prison break!”

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It was chaos. The prisoners had no problem getting away as Petra and Hit Girl did their best in the darkness amid the broken aircraft. CPD did their best, too, not realising until it was too late what was going on. There were enough problems helping the injured and it was ultimately left for Petra and Hit Girl to make their way into the aircraft and make contact with the flight-crew.

As they made their way down the aircraft from the rear, they found three inmates who had not survived the crash landing. One US Marshal was dead, but two more were alive but injured. Petra finally forced open the door to the cockpit and she found both pilots very much alive.

“Nice landing!” she commented.

“Any landing you walk away from. . .” the co-pilot replied with a grin.

Safehouse F

“Well, we’re done for the night,” Mindy commented as she finished putting her damp hair up into a pony tail. “When you guys have an update for me, just call. You coming, Steph, or are you waiting for Dave?”

“Would you mind if I waited for Dave?” Stephanie ventured.

“No, Steph – you’ve done well, tonight.”

Stephanie beamed at the compliment and she ran off towards the galley.

“Night, Abby. Night, Marty.”

“Night, Mindy – stay away from falling aircraft!” Marty laughed.

“Funny. . .”

Mindy climbed into her Jaguar and she made her way to the surface.

West 31st Street

There had been no real reason to stop, but Mindy did, her senses were still on overdrive as she headed home.

She eased the Jaguar to a halt and jumped out, running across to the sidewalk and stopping to check out a dark shape at the base of a wounded tree. It was a man! Mindy rolled the man over – he wore a smart suit jacket, a tie with an interesting pattern, plus dark trousers, and functional shoes. He was unconscious but otherwise breathing normally, despite the blood on his forehead. Mindy reached into the man’s inner jacket pocket and she pulled out his passport – she blanched.

The man was British – that was obvious. The bigger problem, though, was the text beneath the Queen’s crest:

**QUEEN’S
MESSENGER**

COURRIER DIPLOMATIQUE

She quickly pulled out her cell and dialled Paul Murphy.

“Murphy, I need you, an ambulance with a crew you can trust, and Cathy. Meet me at West 31st and South Rockall and make it quiet!”

Murphy was well used to receiving cryptic instructions, and downright weird ones for that matter, from the short blonde woman with the murderous alter ego.