

**Wednesday, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013**

**New York City**

"Hello?"

"Marcus?"

"Mindy! What's going on? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. We know where the Motherfucker's hiding. He's recruiting an army of super-villains and making homemade bombs. Marcus, he wants to burn the city down."

"You promised me. . ."

"I know you see me as this little girl . . . but I'm not and I never was. You're right, Daddy did take my childhood away, but I'm not so sure that was a bad thing. Marcus, he gave me a gift, a gift that I can't escape no matter how hard I try. Neither am I going to spend the next four years of my life trying to figure out who I am, because I already know: I'm Hit Girl!"

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**Sunday, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016**

**Lunchtime**

**Glenview**

"That was the night Mindy came out," Marcus explained.

"Mindy admitted she was gay?" Megan asked incredulously.

"Do I need to tape your mouth shut?" Mindy asked sweetly.

"Nah, I'm good. . ."

"Mindy told me that she had found herself. Mindy told me that she was Hit Girl - I already knew, but I had tried so hard to stamp it out of her. Turned out to be a losing battle; I might as well have tried to hold back the tides."

"She is stubborn!" Megan laughed.

"Dave," Mindy asked. "Do you have that roll of Duct Tape handy?"

"I'm shutting up now. . ."

"It was a bad night for everybody," Marty admitted as he looked over at Dave.

Dave's expression was mixed as he thought back.

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**Wednesday, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013**

**New York City**

*". . . tonight we are going to fuck this city up, or my name is not . . ."*

*"Chris D'Amico!"*

*"That is not my name!"*

*"No, you're right; your new name is Little Bitch."*

*"Oh, this is perfect . . . are you really that stupid - there's two of you, and a whole army of us; do you really have such a hard on to die."*

*"No, that's why we brought our friends."*

*...*

*"Avengers assemble, asshole!"*

*"What's the matter, Chris? Shit hit your shorts?"*

*"Yeah, and I'm gonna wipe my ass with your face."*

*"You're gonna pay for what you did to my Dad."*

*"Your Dad? You blew up my Dad with a bazooka!"*

*"I know how to get this started . . . Schwanz!"*

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**Sunday, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016**

**Glenview**

"That was Night-Bitch," Marty said with a wary glance over at Stephanie.

"It was amazing - the barking, snarling, Eisenhower bounded through the crowd and he made straight for Chris's crotch," Dave explained as Sophia sat up and ran her tongue over her jaws.

"Eisenhower was there, too?" Stephanie asked.

"Yes, he came with me," Isaac replied.

"It was a wild fight and one which I did not expect to survive," Marty admitted. "Hit Girl was facing off with that massive bitch. . ."

"Mother Russia," Mindy mused. "She was a challenge, to put it mildly."

"You should have seen your Mom and Dad, Tommy - they were awesome!" Marty said with a look over at Tony and Shannon who sat on the other couch.

"It was an experience," Shannon admitted with a smile.

"Then Mindy left," Dave said. "It was the worst moment of my life. I never knew what I had until it was gone."

"I hated leaving, but I had to. I had to protect Marcus. I had to protect everybody that I loved - and that included Dave," Mindy admitted shyly.

"Thus, the story began. Mindy killed some guy who tried to bike-jack her and the rest is history," Dave finished.

"You don't have to be a badass to be a superhero, Dave, you just have to brave," Mindy echoed from three years previously as she leaned over and gave her husband a deep and loving kiss.

Dave grinned.

"Back then, that was my first kiss. . ." Mindy admitted, her cheeks turning pink.

"And you know what she said to me?" Dave prompted.

"Be nice or I rip your ass out through your mouth!" Mindy growled.

Everybody laughed, even Marcus.

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***The following morning***  
***Monday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016***

***Glenview***

"This is ominous," Saoirse commented as she and Stephanie were directed by Mindy to sit down in the living room.

"Tell me about it," Stephanie growled as she recognised the lady sitting across from them.

Stephanie glared at the woman for a moment before Mindy dived in.

"Obviously, Stephanie remembers you," she mused. "Saoirse, this is Deputy Director Landy of the Central Intelligence Agency."

Saoirse scowled too.

"I know you two have no love for the CIA - and your hate is well founded. I am very pleased that you are both free to live your lives as you see fit. As you know, *Urban Predator* is dead - but there has been immense fallout from your operation in France. There have been many high-level talks between the Governments of France, Great Britain, and the United States. All three Governments have accepted responsibility for what occurred right under their noses, within their own borders. As such, a fund has been assembled to provide each surviving *Predator* with financial aid to assist with their rehabilitation."

Saoirse and Stephanie both appeared surprised at that revelation.

"There are times when Governments *can* actually do the right thing at the right time - and yes, it surprises me too. The British Government will be providing a significant bounty to the both of you for what you did to bring down *Urban Predator*. The British

Government will also compensate those *Predators* who have been rehomed, such as the girls currently under the protection of *Vengeance*, in the UK. The US Government will look after the Abbott girls and Aiden Maxwell in Gotham. They will also provide for any future American *Predators* as they are recovered," Landy elaborated. "It has taken many months to identify those *Predators* recovered from France. Many have no living family and they are being looked after by their home country. Some have been rehomed with relatives, if they exist. However, as you both know, it is not an easy transition from being a *Predator* to being a normal boy or girl. As such, I have asked Mindy to help with the re-settling of *Predators* and the ongoing support for them."

"I thought immediately of you two," Mindy explained. "I can think of no others who have the compassion and intelligence to help other *Predators* just like yourselves."

Stephanie and Saoirse appeared very surprised.

"You are both uniquely suited to the task," Mindy went on. "Will you do it?"

Stephanie looked up at Saoirse, who smiled. The two girls could communicate without speech - a skill which often annoyed Mindy, amongst others.

"Yes," Stephanie said. "We'll do it."

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### ***That same time***

#### ***West Columbia***

"Anybody seen my cuffs?" Marcus asked.

"I'll just go get 'em," Megan said as she vanished upstairs.

Marcus gave Paige a questioning look. Paige just looked down at young Damon and grimaced. Megan soon reappeared with the handcuffs which she passed to Marcus.

"Where were they?" Marcus asked suspiciously.

"In my bedroom. . ." Megan replied innocently.

"Why?" Marcus asked.

"Curtis was over, last night. . ." Paige offered with a chuckle.

"Never mind - I'll get a new set. . ." Marcus growled disgustedly as he handed the cuffs back to Megan and headed out the door.

Megan grinned at her mother.

"I don't know what they must think down at the precinct," Paige said conversationally with a twinkle in her eye. "We go through so many pairs of cuffs. . ."

Megan looked appalled.

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***The following day  
Tuesday, August 23<sup>rd</sup>***

***Glenview***

"Your first tasking," Mindy said as she dropped a pair of thick files onto a table.

"Cool!" Stephanie commented.

"Where?" Saoirse asked.

"Indianapolis. . ."

"How will we get there?" Saoirse persisted.

"Mathilda will drive you both and act as overwatch."

"When do we leave?"

"This afternoon."

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***Tuesday, May 10th, 2016***

***Toulouse, France***

It was another day.

To be exact, it was day 1,630 of the boy's incarceration as a *Predator*. It had been four years, five months, and seventeen days since he was taken - not that he was counting. He was alone - he had been alone for all that time. His family was gone: his parents, his brother; all were gone for ever. He sat up in his bed and swung his legs out from under the duvet. His feet came into contact with the cold lino floor and he shivered. All around him, other boys were coming awake. They varied in ages from around eight-years-old to boys who were closer to fifteen.

There was a set routine which all followed - deviation brought you to the attention of the instructors and that was not conducive, in any way, to a long and happy life. He stood up and pulled off his T-shirt, dumping it on the bed behind him - his boxer shorts followed and he headed for the showers, a towel in his hand. After the hot shower, he dressed and joined the dozens of other boys as they left the dormitory and made their way to breakfast. En route, they mingled with dozens of girls as they too left their own dormitory.

Breakfast consisted of a large buffet from which the kids could help themselves. Every child ate a large breakfast as lunch was quite a few hours away and the day would be strenuous for all.

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By lunchtime, the twelve-year-old boy was hungry. He had spent an hour on the range, another hour sparring with his colleagues, and then an hour listening to an instructor prattle on about covert infiltration tactics. Lunch consisted of high-protein foods, such as chicken, eggs, oatmeal, and fish. Milk was also available in almost obscene quantities. Every *Predator* had their diet inspected on a regular basis to ensure that they were healthy and that their bodies were building up the relevant muscle and bulk required to cope with the arduous training program.

Hunter Graves, just the week before, had reached the peak of his potential. He had been granted Phase 3 status and he had been given his much-coveted codename: Cut-Throat. That previous week had also seen a massive influx of instructors, security personnel, and other *Predators*. There were many rumours unfolding - each one wilder and more nuts than the previous one. That afternoon, things appeared to be taking a turn for the worst as Hunter found himself issued with body armour and a SIG Sauer assault rifle. He spent another hour at the range honing his skills with the weapon.

As he cleaned his weapon, he overheard the instructors discussing defensive tactics. Was something going on?

"Graves - stow your weapon and go get something to eat then return here for your duty posting."

"Yes, sir!"

Hunter got a nasty shock when he entered the dining room. 'Nasty' might not have been the best description but he was shaken to the core by the person he saw sat at a table with some other *Predators*.

"Leo?" Hunter demanded as he stopped at the table.

The ten-year-old boy turned and then his face dissolved into tears as he recognised his big brother.

"You're dead - I killed you. . ." Leo Graves began.

"I could say the same thing," Hunter replied as he hugged his younger brother. "Where the hell did you come from?"

"I just got here - few minutes ago."

The two brothers moved to a spare table where they ate their meal together and they talked. Both had believed each other to be dead, but their inner psyche had still held out hope that they would once again be reunited. As Hunter finished his food, he knew that he had to get back to his duty posting.

"Leo - I'm sorry about this but I have to go; some weird duty posting. I'm sure it's just some fucked up training thing. I'll see you later, or most probably in the morning. It's really good to know that you're still alive."

"Stay safe, Hunter."

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Several hours later, Hunter found himself standing just inside an external door, his assault rifle at the ready. He was certain that the whole thing was some over the top exercise - at least until a klaxon sounded, red lights began to flash, and gunfire erupted from the direction of the kitchens. He saw an instructor gunned down, several yards away down a corridor - that brought it home to him that it was not an exercise.

Hunter had no idea who or what the enemy were - apparently, the instructors had no idea either. For over an hour, Hunter kept out of the way while he had no idea who the enemy were. He did catch sight of some armour-clad individuals armed to the teeth. Somewhere, things took a turn for the worst as *Predators* turned on their former instructors and captors. The place was sheer pandemonium with explosions and gunfire coming from all directions. Hunter ran towards the main accommodation - along the way, he passed several *Predators* who had been Tasered - but then, as he came around a corner, he collided with several young *Predators*.

"Hunter!"

"Leo! Are you okay?"

"Yes - we're scared and we don't know what we're supposed to do. There's people killing instructors - they have body armour."

"I know - it looks like *Urban Predator* is coming apart. Come with me."

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Hunter moved forwards, followed by Leo and four other young Phase 2 *Predators*. As they made their way down the corridor, two instructors stepped out of a classroom. Without hesitation, Hunter dropped them both with a roar of gunfire.

"Leo - grab a weapon!"

Leo grabbed up a pistol while one of his friends picked up the other discarded pistol. They all ran looking for help - all they found were dead instructors and security guards. Then it happened - there was an explosion and the ceiling above them collapsed knocking out two of the kids - Leo pulled at another kid and they both helped Hunter out from underneath the smashed ceiling tiles. There was no sign of the other *Predator*. One of the kids yelled out as three men appeared - security guards. Leo shot one but he was knocked down by one of the guards. Hunter was unable to shoot as he found that Leo and another kid were in his line of fire.

"Get down, Leo!"

Leo dove for the ground, dragging the other kid with him. Hunter held down the trigger, emptying the magazine and dropping the two remaining guards but not before one of the guards had thrown a knife

at Hunter. The knife went into his left shoulder, just above his body armour, passing all the way through, up to the hilt. Hunter yelled out in agony but he was able to scoop up a pistol as he staggered backwards. He shot the security guard in the face as he scrambled towards his brother who was huddled against the wall.

"Hunter!" he yelled out as he saw the knife protruding from his brother's shoulder.

"We gotta move, Leo - let's go!"

Leo had just got back to his feet when two more security guards appeared, one fell as an armoured individual sank a sword into his chest. The other guard fired off several bursts from his assault rifle. Hunter threw himself in front of his brother as the bullets struck his body armour, one finding his upper chest. Hunter heard a scream behind him and as he fell to the floor, he saw his brother, blood spreading across his torso.

His last sight was of a pair of crimson-clad legs which appeared between him and his brother.

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***The Present Day***

***Tuesday, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016***

***Indianapolis***

"Hello."

"I believe you are expecting us, Mr Travers."

"You are. . ."

"Saoirse Doherty and Stephanie Lizewski - our identification, Mr Travers."

The two girls handed over their CIA credentials which Mr Travers scrutinised.

"Come in, please."

He handed back the credentials before he led the two girls into the living room.

"Please sit down - I'll go get the boys."

A few minutes later, two boys came into the room accompanied by a woman with curly, light brown hair.

"Hunter, Leo - Stephanie and Saoirse," Mr Travers said as he introduced the boys.

Hunter studied the two seated girls, then he walked around to them and he stood his ground.

"Let's see 'em," he ordered.



Both girls leaned forwards and tipped their heads so that Hunter could see behind their right ears. He nodded and sighed as he sat down, pulling his brother to sit down beside him on the couch. Mr and Mrs Travers sat down on another couch.

"Hunter, Leo - cards on the table - we are both *Predators*. We were both there at the end, in Toulouse. We know that you have both spent two months in hospital before finding your way to your aunt and uncle. We are here to help you in any way that we can. We will not interfere, nor will we push you into anything," Saoirse explained.

"I was Phase 2, Saoirse was Phase 3. We know what you both went through. We also know how hard it is to reintegrate into society. We know that deep within you, you have an urge to kill . . ." Stephanie said.

Nicola Travers looked shocked by the blatant remark which had just come out of a ten-year-old girl's mouth.

". . . you have an urge to destroy, to maim. At times, it is irresistible; you just want to hurt somebody. You wake up at night soaked to the skin having had the most horrendous nightmare. The only thing that keeps you even remotely sane is each other - yes?"

Leo looked relieved at Stephanie's comments.

"Okay - I believe you; you obviously suffer the same way that me and Leo do," Hunter replied. "What can you do to help us? Our aunt and uncle have put up with a lot over the past few weeks and it isn't fair on them - they have three kids of their own and . . . and I know that they have both had second thoughts about taking us in . . ."

"No, Hunter," Nicola Travers said quickly. "It has been a struggle, but you and Leo are family - we would never refuse you a roof; a place for you both to call home."

"Thanks, Aunt Nicola," Hunter said with a smile.

"Could we speak with your aunt and uncle, please," Saoirse said pointedly and she received nods from both boys.

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Once the boys had left the room, Stephanie turned to the Travers.

"What do you know about where the boys have been for the past few years?" Stephanie asked.

Jeremy and Nicola Travers looked at each other, exchanging a glance.

"We don't really know; the boys won't talk about it," Jeremy Travers replied in an even tone. "The US Marshal who brought the boys to us, she explained that the boys had been through hell but she could not divulge any more."

Stephanie took a deep breath before she spoke.

"Both boys were taken by force from their parents. They would have been scared stupid as they were hooded and tied. The first few days would have been disorientating as they were pumped full of drugs that played with their minds. They would have begun to forget things - even each other. They were only allowed to remember what the instructors wanted them to remember. They would have been forced to learn bad things. How to kill. How to maim. How to torture. If they did not obey, they were disciplined.

"Discipline began with the baton that all instructors carried. Those batons hurt like hell. Next came the leather strap which was used in extreme circumstances - they used it on your bare arse and you could not sit down for hours. For those who needed worse, there was The Cage. The kid would be stripped naked and thrown behind bars for a number of days. In general, you lived from day to day, hoping for something better, but it never came. The boys may have had different experiences to Saoirse and me, but not wildly so. Hunter is young, very young for a Phase 3; that marks him out as being very advanced and highly skilled. You want to know his codename?"

There was a pause before Nicola Travers nodded.

"Cut-throat."

"Oh, my God," Nicola Travers exclaimed. "You both went through all that?"

"Yes," Saoirse replied and Stephanie nodded as she spoke again.

"The place was hell on earth. I was bullied almost from the moment I was taken; I was seven-years-old. I was always too small, too skinny, too British . . . Finally, when I was eight, I snapped. I killed my main tormentor, in the shower one morning - smashed her skull to pieces. You know what the instructors did? They said well done and gave me my codename."

"They're *both* killers?" Jeremy Travers asked with dread in his tone.

"Yes - and if Hunter made it to Phase 3, then he is an expert. Leo, too," Saoirse confirmed.

"What is it that you can do for them?" Nicola Travers asked.

"One of the most important things is to be able to talk. Saoirse is my best friend - she used to be my nemesis; she was sent to kill me, but she failed. Now we rely on each other for somebody to talk to - it makes a difference that we can relate to one another."

"You are friends, even though. . ." Nicola Travers demanded.

"Yes - the circumstances are exceptional but we need each other to survive. Your nephews make thirteen *Predators* recovered, by us, so far. We can ensure that they have somebody to talk to; somebody who has experienced what they have gone through. My parents run a Dojang, in Chicago. We run special classes for *Predators*. The time allows them to exercise their frustrations in a safe environment. We

allow one-on-one and multiple-on-one sparring. Somebody is always on hand to stop everything if things go too far. Or we just Taser their arses!" Stephanie explained. "*Predators* have needs. Of course, we can't let them kill, but we can let them use their skills in a controlled environment with others just like them. We can help them bury their skills if need be. We can also teach the both of you how to control them both - if needs be. Which brings me onto another question - how much do your own kids know?"

"Very little, but they have had cause to be scared of their cousins. I know it isn't anybody's fault, but things get said and Hunter or Leo just explode."

"We can also put you in touch with others who look after *Predators* - if that helps," Saoirse explained. "We know that gaining two more mouths to feed will also be a financial burden to you both. As such, the US Government will provide each boy with a lump sum to help with their resettlement. You will also receive a monthly stipend to help ends meet. You also need to keep your mouths shut. *Urban Predator* will never come out - that is for the good of the respective governments and also for the *Predators* themselves."

"We understand."

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Once the boys had returned, Stephanie explained about the money and the Dojang.

"Why should we listen to a little girl - even if she was a *Predator*?" Hunter said sharply.

"Would knowing my codename help?"

"You said you was Phase 2 - they don't get codenames. . ." Hunter paused as he watched Stephanie's expression. "Only one person has ever gained their codename in Phase 2 . . . you?"

Stephanie nodded.

"You are Psyche?"

"Please don't," Saoirse commented dryly. "She's hard enough to live with as it is."

Stephanie ignored her friend.

"Yes, I am."

"Okay - we accept," Hunter agreed.

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***That evening***

***Glenview***

"Well done, girls."

Stephanie smiled up at Mindy. Saoirse, though, appeared guarded.

"I get the feeling that we're not done yet."

Mindy smiled.

"Not by a long shot, my little *Predator* princesses!"

Both girls groaned.