

Author's Note: *Events in the first part of this chapter, and in the latter part of the previous one, will operate in parallel with Chapter 5: Escalation and Chapter 6: Take Down of my other story, Creatures of the Night.*

The next afternoon

Wednesday, August 31st, 2016

Pacific Predator

"Well, that was fun," Dave commented.

"I think it is the right thing to do, don't you?"

"I just hope it doesn't backfire on us . . . or anybody else for that matter."

"I'll explain it all to Erika - she'll have the job of keeping an eye on them. It's only a couple of hours' drive, or an hour's flight time, from L.A. to here," Mindy commented.

"She's gonna love you!"

"She'll get over it - I got her the car she wanted, so she can't exactly complain if I make her life a tiny bit more complicated."

Dave just shook his head and he went back to cleaning his weapons ready for the night's action.

That night

Mid-City, just south of Downtown

It was a little after eight that night when Hit Girl and Kick-Ass broke through the outer perimeter of the industrial complex.

It had not been much of a surprise to find an increase in the number of roving guards - a direct consequence of the previous night's activities. As far as they could tell, there were about eighteen armed men and women scattered around the outside of the facility - a walk in the park as far as Hit Girl was concerned. They both wore their Fusion Covert Combat Suits or FCCS for short, just as they had on the previous evening.

Hit Girl went first - she was the more stealthy of the pair, after all. Kick-Ass followed, packing a Franchi SPAS-12 combat shotgun and a suppressed .45-calibre Glock 21. Hit Girl was packing twin suppressed .40-calibre Glock 23 pistols, as well as her numerous ever-present blades. Almost every floodlight was lit but there was plenty of shadow, not to mention that there was plenty of space to manoeuvre above the bright lights.

As soon as they closed the lights, Hit Girl preferred to take the more challenging route above - it was so much more of a challenge,

she thought. Kick-Ass remained below on the ground - he felt safer on the ground. He ensured that he could see his partner at all times, just in case he had to intervene. Hit Girl knew that she was good, but she also knew that she was not invincible, so knowing that Kick-Ass was close by filled her with a feeling of well-being.

The first man fell to Kick-Ass, much to Hit Girl's annoyance. The man had stepped into a suitable shadow so that he could have a cigarette.

"Well, they do say cigarettes kill," Kick-Ass quipped.

"Funny, green asshole!"

Hit Girl swung down from the pipe network, hanging upside down as she dropped two guards with her pistols.

"That's two to your one - your move!" she growled as she flipped down to the ground.

Kick-Ass chuckled as he kept moving.

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"That's three to your two, honey!" Kick-Ass laughed as he drove the butt of his shotgun into the head of one and then the other guard.

Hit Girl was getting angry - she was not about to be upstaged by a dick in a wetsuit! Then she paused as she came around the far side of the facility - there was a body on the ground, lying on her back. On closer inspection, Hit Girl found the knife wound in the chest. Just the single stab wound, nothing more. There was no sign of a struggle, either, indicating a professional strike out of the darkness.

"We have company, Kick-Ass - we have a *Predator*, maybe two."

"I thought I was getting a week away from goddamn crazy nutcase killers!" Kick-Ass growled.

"What about me?"

"You're not crazy," Kick-Ass pointed out.

"So, I'm a nutcase as well as a killer?"

"I would say so."

"Let's get on with this before *they* get all the kills!"

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It was crucial to gain entry to the facility before the men inside realised that something was wrong - if they were concerned for their safety, then they might kill their workers. Kick-Ass and Hit Girl put down a guard each before they headed for the target building and quickly made their way inside. It felt good to Hit Girl to be inside the building with clothes on; she was *not* repeating *that* exercise.

They closed from the southern end of the building and stopped within the confines of the shadows, a few feet from the dazzlingly bright arc lights. As before, there was a group of about thirty naked women going about their taskings. Watching over them, were twelve armed men, a combination of pistols and automatic weapons in evidence. At the head of the T-shaped table, a large guard stood before the counting room where there appeared to be heavy security - at least six men were visible around the man who was busy counting a large amount of cash - obviously eager to make up for what they had lost.

Hit Girl looked over at Kick-Ass.

"You ready for this?" she asked.

"You really have to ask?"

"Nah! Fire in the hole!"

With that, they each threw a pair of M84 stun grenades into the light.

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The detonation of seven stun grenades, each good for 180 decibels, was monumental and the entire building shook as the sound reverberated around the metal work, amplified as it bounced around. The million-candela flash multiplied seven times was just as monumental and every person within the facility (excepting the four vigilantes) reeled in pain from the combined effects of disorientation, confusion, loss of balance, and loss of coordination. They all suffered from intense inner ear disturbance, tinnitus, and deafness - not to mention the flash blindness.

Kick-Ass and Hit Girl, protected from the effects by their high-tech masks, rushed forwards and pushed the naked girls to the floor while they targeted the guards. The additional three M84s had been a rude surprise but not entirely unexpected. It was obvious that the opposing team was present and following a very similar plan of action. It was also equally obvious that they had not expected the additional M84s and Hit Girl could see a pair of black-clad forms rolling about on the ground a few feet from the incapacitated gunmen.

"I'm going for the Predators - you get the girls moving!" Hit Girl ordered and she ran over towards the two girls.

"Fucking get up!" she yelled as she pulled them both to their feet.

The taller one was the first to respond, shaking her head and then pulling away as she took in who had helped her. She pulled her younger friend with her.

"Watch yourselves!"

Hit Girl drew her pistols and she began to drop any guard within sight. Kick-Ass was visible pulling naked girls to their feet and shoving them bodily towards the exit. Most were responding but some

of the younger ones were struggling from the effects of the explosions and bright flashes, not to mention the sounds of gunfire which was echoing around the building. It was obvious that some of the guards had responded well to the grenades - maybe they were used to the non-lethal weapons. Either way, they were responding with everything that they had to hand.

But then so was Hit Girl.

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The guards were organised - they were protecting their money and the man counting the money. The standoff was obviously intended to give the men in the backroom time to pack up the cash and make a run for it. The backroom had a back exit - typically. However, when one of the guards tried to open it.

"Hey! The damn door is stuck!"

Yeah - Kick-Ass had kind of pushed a large dumpster against the outside of the door . . . seemed the right thing to do at the time. The language that flowed out of the room was borderline extreme - even by Hit Girl's standards. The gunfire increased as the guards made to push their escape. Then one of them made a stupid mistake - he threw a smoke grenade out towards the machinery in a bid to cover their escape.

The heat generated by the device as it issued copious amounts of white smoke set fire to a pile of oily rags. It did not take long for the additional black smoke to begin filling the building.

"Fucking, cretins!" Hit Girl breathed.

"Well, that puts a clock on things," Kick-Ass pointed out.

"Yeah - we'll have fire and police here in minutes," Hit Girl agreed as she made her way through the smoke.

Bullets were being fired off, indiscriminately in all directions and in some cases, they then ricocheted off the steel work back down to earth in unexpected directions. Kick-Ass saw four men were escorting the money man. He was a fat man and choking on the thick smoke as he was pushed forwards and in the direction of assumed safety. The five men made their way down behind an enormous piece of machinery.

Kick-Ass followed, trying to get into a good position to take down the guards, all of whom carried automatic weapons. Hit Girl made a wide sweep to try and flank them. As she went, she found a firefight in progress which appeared to end as a gunman sprawled to the ground, blood spilling out of his torn torso. Two more gunmen took off, so Hit Girl dropped them both with a couple of rounds each.

Hit Girl noticed the taller girl over by some machinery, the younger girl next to her. Hit Girl waved a hand in their direction before she dived into the swirling black smoke.

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Kick-Ass kept up a running commentary over the communications as he tracked the five men through the facility. Hit Girl, meanwhile, was closing in from her own direction. They were making their way towards the southern end of the facility - towards the water. Hit Girl assumed that they had a waterborne escape planned. She could also hear sirens wailing in the distance over the sounds of the crackling flames.

"They're just approaching the back exit - hold on . . . I just got a look through a gap in the smoke; the girls are down. You think you can handle the goons?"

"I should be insulted that you would even suggest that I could not handle a five to one fight - but I know you like to worry, so I'll let it slide."

Kick-Ass chuckled to himself as she jumped onto a catwalk and ran through the smoke, his mask protecting him from the worst and his low-light vision allowing him to move at speed.

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The two girls were both on the ground, coughing and spluttering. The younger one looked to be in a bad way while the older one was struggling to stay conscious. Kick-Ass jumped down behind them and without a moment's thought, he swept up both girls and he ran in the direction of the five running gunmen.

As he came closer, he could hear the sounds of mayhem and mutilation that could only be attributed to Hit Girl on a rampage. Indeed, the southern end of the facility was relatively smoke free and as such he was able to see his vigilante companion as she flew through the air, twin Wakizashi swords in her hands. One man was already badly mutilated and he lay in a growing pool of his own blood. Two more men were impaled and then eviscerated as Hit Girl regained her feet to face the final gunman and his overweight protectee.

The gunman made a feeble effort to fill the air with lead but to no avail as Hit Girl bent and twisted her body before coming to rest *behind* the gunman and she drove both blades into his back, allowing him to fall to the ground as she turned to the money man.

"Take it - it's yours, all of it. Please . . . just let me live. . ."

The wimpy fuck was crying as he begged for his life. Hit Girl was not one to give mercy. Yes, she had changed and matured over the years and she chose who and when to kill. However, there were certain people who she came across that turned her back into that feral creature which Kick-Ass had first discovered slaughtering cunts in a downtown apartment. Kick-Ass knew when to steer well clear and allow his partner to dish out her own form of vengeance and justice. The money man fell beside his guards, his insides spilling out around him as he bled out. The pain was beyond anything

which he had ever experienced and he went to hell with his own steaming intestines being the last thing which he would ever see.

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The area behind the facility, on the south side was relatively safe; all the police and firemen were towards the north end where the fire was raging at its worst. Kick-Ass had laid the two girls out in the recovery position and he had given each of them a blast of pure oxygen to relieve their lungs. Both were still out cold. Hit Girl took a moment to check behind the right ear of each girl while they lay unconscious. She was very surprised on checking the younger of the two girls and finding nothing there. Whatever their story was, it had to be a good one.

After a comprehensive sweep to ensure that the girls were safe and secure, Kick-Ass and Hit Girl returned to the two vigilantes for a moment before leaving the scene.

"Sleep tight," Hit Girl said to the older girl as she and Kick-Ass blended into the swirling smoke.

Late the following afternoon

Thursday, September 1st

Chicago

"Why are you staring at my ass?"

"Just imagining what it'll look like once Marcus has finished spanking you."

Mindy's cheeks went pink at the suggestion.

"How about you spank me?"

Dave smiled wistfully as he walked towards the hatch. Once he was on the concrete, he managed to walk almost ten feet before the sprinting Stephanie slammed into him and her arms gripped him tightly around the waist.

"Dad!"

"Good to see you, Steph," Dave replied as he hugged his daughter back. "Any chance I can be allowed to breathe?"

Stephanie grinned up at Dave as she released him.

"She's been insatiable, ever since I picked her up, this morning," Paige laughed. "Marcus has taken Megan, Anne-Marie, and Danny into the office with him. We'll pick them up - assuming they haven't destroyed the District - on the way home, Dave."

"Suits me," Dave commented. "Hi, Electra - you okay?"

"Yes, thanks, Dave - Stephanie has been keeping me very busy."

"You two been mile-highing?" Paige quipped.

"I'm not one to kiss and tell," Mindy grinned deviously as she joined Dave.

"Ewww! Do we need to clean off the seats before I sit down?"

"Oh, yeah, little Stephy!" Mindy chuckled.

"See you, Dad!" Stephanie called out as she scampered for the steps and vanished aboard the jet followed by Electra who waved at Dave.

"You be good, now," Dave suggested.

"I can't promise anything," Mindy replied as she gave her husband a very deep and very passionate kiss which had Paige blushing.

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Once aboard, and with the hatch shut, Mindy turned to Stephanie.

"You gave Dave a hug, why not me?"

"You get better, Mum," Stephanie grinned. "You get *me*, on a plane, for *seven hours!*"

Mindy laughed nervously.

"Where are the parachutes," she commented dryly.

"This could be a very long flight," Electra added.

"With you aboard, yes!" Stephanie countered and she was still grinning as she planted herself in a seat and strapped herself in. "Well, I want to know all about those explosions in San Diego - Marcus says he wants to tan your arse!"

"It was an accident - well, kind of. . ."

"Okay, Mother - let's hear it."

"This ought to be good," Electra grinned.

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Mindy awoke part way into the flight and headed aft to make use of the bathroom. On her return through the darkened cabin, she noticed that Electra was awake. The two girls had gone to sleep on the same settee.

"You okay, honey?" Mindy asked and Electra nodded.

Mindy sat back down where she had been sleeping and she saw Electra eyeing up the seat next her.

"Come and sit down beside me and we can talk," Mindy suggested.

"Thanks."

Once Electra was settled, with her legs crossed and facing Mindy, Mindy spoke.

"I have a question, Electra. I noticed that Steph calls you 'lectra - dropping the 'E'. I also noticed that when Megan tried that, you nearly ripped her head off."

Electra smiled.

"Stephanie was the first to call me that . . . and, well I liked it - but from her only. Mindy - you can call me 'lectra too, if you'd like."

"Thanks, 'lectra. You and Stephanie have a history; I know that . . . but there's more, I think."

"Stephanie was the first person to treat me like a human-being. I was a Yellow, as you know. Nobody paid any attention to us Yellows - not that I ever blamed the *Predators*; they had a lot on their plates and they were treated pretty harshly. I found that out . . . once I became a *Predator* myself. Anyway - even though Stephanie was in a cage, stark naked, she still had the time to treat me like a human being. I first met her, when she came under my custody for two weeks of hell in The Cage. When she was brought in, naked, she was unconscious - they had beaten her really badly. Then she noticed a blackeye, one morning. Despite her privations, she taught me how to protect myself from the Yellow who had punched me. Without her, I would be dead - Yellows never got a chance to prove themselves; Stephanie got me that chance.

"Okay, it went badly for me, at first - I got stabbed and slashed, but Stephanie stayed with me the whole time. Yes, she had no choice, but she helped me way more than I thought she ever would. I love her more than anybody else, ever - I have nobody, but Stephanie. She's a really strong girl - putting up with being a *Predator*, then she gets stuck with me. No matter what anybody throws at that girl, she always pushes through it. I feel blessed having found Stephanie and then I was rescued by Cassie's Dad - any other ship and I don't know. He was the first to treat me as a human being, since Stephanie. That was why I gave up fighting and allowed him to rescue me."

"Thank you for telling me that, 'lectra - you've been very brave for anybody, let alone somebody your age."

"You know something, Mindy. You are nothing like what we were told Hit Girl was like. We were told that she only thought of herself and didn't care about anybody."

"They were right - at least until I found Dave and then Chloe. Together, they introduced me to my emotions. I found that I could really care about somebody and I found that I liked caring about people. It was hard; really hard. Then I became a parent - what I felt when Anne-Marie was taken; I had never felt those feelings before. But the feeling when I finally found her. . . Then, a couple months back, when Stephanie was shot, I felt so empty. I worried about how I could go on without Stephanie in my life. She lights up my world - I love her. Each time she died; I died inside. She's a

very special girl and I'm learning things from her, just as she is learning things from me."

"Thank you for telling me - you've made me part of your worldwide family. The family of *Fusion*, with its cousin, *Vengeance*."

"Let's get some sleep and we can talk again over breakfast," Mindy suggested.

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With a little over an hour before landing, Mindy awoke and she stretched her long legs.

"Coffee, Mindy?" Amy asked from the galley.

"Thank you," Mindy replied as she took the steaming mug of coffee.

"Breakfast will be along in about ten minutes," Amy added as she returned to the galley.

Mindy looked across at the sleeping Stephanie and Electra. Like most little girls that age, they both appeared angelic while sleeping. Dave referred to Stephanie as a coiled viper when she was sleeping. The euphemism was very apt, considering that the girl could go from asleep to defensive in an instant. Mindy gently shook her daughter by the shoulder until she snapped awake and groaned.

"I need to wee!" she exclaimed as she suddenly bolted up and ran aft to the head.

A few minutes later, Stephanie reappeared looking refreshed and neat - having taken the time to tidy her hair and wash her face. Electra had awoken and was awaiting Stephanie's return, so she quickly scrambled aft to the head just as needy for the facilities.

"Morning, Mum - morning, Amy!" Stephanie called out.

"Morning, sweetie," Mindy replied.

"Good morning, Stephanie," Amy replied as she placed a glass of orange juice down at a table for Stephanie, plus another for Electra.

"Thank you. Umm, that smells good - I'm ravenous," Stephanie commented as she sat down.

"What's new!" Mindy chuckled as she sat down opposite her daughter.

They were joined a few minutes later by Electra who also looked much more herself as she sat down and took a long gulp of orange juice.

Amy reappeared with three steaming plates piled high with bacon, eggs, sausages, baked beans, and hash browns. Electra and Stephanie smiled broadly as they got stuck in.

"Thank you, Amy - have you all eaten?"

"Yes, thank you, Mindy."

"I hope you enjoy your time in Edinburgh - we won't be needing the jet till the weekend."

"Oh, we have plans!" Amy grinned.

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"You two enjoy your heart-to-heart, then?" Stephanie asked as she munched her way down a sausage.

Electra's face went pink.

"How much did you hear?" she asked.

"A good amount," Stephanie replied, her own face turning pink. "It's not often I hear somebody say such nice things about me."

"I meant every word, Steph," Electra confirmed.

"You are a very special girl, Steph," Mindy added. "Despite your antics. . ."

"Thanks, Mum - it feels good to have people like me for who I am," Stephanie said meekly.

"At least the nice side, which is usually overshadowed by the bitchy Psyche who thinks she's the queen-bee," Electra stated as she finished bacon.

Stephanie grinned as she downed her orange juice.

"I must have been a very bad person in a former life to have to suffer you two," Mindy complained as she stabbed an errant hash brown.

"Past life - you looked at yourself in *this* life?" Stephanie quipped and she ignored the icy 'Hit Girl' stare.

"Once upon a time, I was feared by all, even Kick-Ass - now I get no respect whatsoever!"

"When she moans, she moans!" Stephanie commented to Electra.

"Does she ever!" Electra replied as Mindy scowled.

Inside, Mindy felt happier than she had been in a while. For once she appeared to be getting something right in life and she had her family that she adored and who appeared to adore her in return. Her life was perfect and she hoped that her Daddy was proud of her, wherever he was.

"Right, you little varmints - I would suggest that you both finish your food because we're going to be landing very soon," Mindy growled good-naturedly.

"She does like to growl, doesn't she?" Electra commented.

"She's not called a bitch for nothing," Stephanie replied. "Dave says she likes having her tummy rubbed, too."

Mindy's face went very pink as she drained her coffee mug and headed aft, ignoring the snickering coming from the two little girls.