

Tuesday, October 2nd, 2010

**The Urban Predator Academy
Colorado, United States of America**

As a combined birthday present, the two eleven-year-olds, Lucy and Leo had been moved into a mini apartment, across the corridor from the two main dormitories, only one of which was in use.

The suite consisted of two ensuite bedrooms, very much like those they had inhabited for the first months, plus a recreational area adjoining both bedrooms which was equipped with a TV, a secure computer, and a small kitchenette. It was intended as a show of trust from the instructors - and a place for Lucy to play her 1980's music which they were fed up of hearing around the facility!

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"Lucy! Leo!"

There was banging on their respective bedroom doors which were shoved open and their bedroom lights were switched on. The girl's eyes squinted in the dazzling light but she quickly snapped awake and swung her legs onto the floor.

"We have a job for you, girl," Instructor Millar offered cheerfully.

"What?"

"A pair of Apprentices have escaped. We want you to hunt them down.
. ."

Lucy smirked. Finally - some action!

While the instructor vanished across the way to notify Leo, Lucy stripped naked before she pulled on some clean black boy-shorts and a black sports bra. She then pulled on a pair of black combat trousers, a black T-shirt, some black socks and her black lightweight combat boots.

She emerged into the recreational area to find Leo waiting - he was dressed just the same (except for the boy-shorts and the bra!).

"Your kit - let's move!"

Millar handed Lucy and Leo a set of black webbing each. The webbing was pre-equipped with a pistol, knife, plus other supplies and equipment. Lucy and Leo pulled their webbing on and strapped it into place as they ran after Instructor Millar. A pistol holster hung over their right hips and was clipped around their right thighs. The eight-inch knife hung vertically on the left side of their chests.

By the time the group reached the vehicle garage, both were ready. A desert camouflage Humvee sat with its engine running and the left rear door open. Inside were three members of the *Urban Predator Security Force*. They smiled as Lucy and Leo climbed aboard and slammed the door shut.

"You ready, young Lucy?" Rudy Boise laughed.

"Bite me, Boise!" came the insolent reply to which the three men laughed.

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The Humvee quickly left the blacktop and turned off-road. The two kids had obviously been missing for a while and covered some distance.

"Who are they?" Leo asked.

"Robert Evans and Trina Carroll. They were found missing, about four hours ago. Hanley has ordered their termination," Boise advised the two youngsters.

"We can handle that," Lucy advised.

A couple of minutes later, the Humvee skidded to a stop and Boise turned to Leo and Lucy.

"Go get them - call on Channel 2 when you need picked up."

"Don't wait up, boys!" Lucy growled as she left the Humvee and vanished into the darkness with Leo close behind.

Boise watched them go. It was a fortunate test for the two youngsters. Somewhere along the line, they would have to learn to kill, to take a life, if they were to become assassins. Hanley had made his point very clear. Either the runaways died at the hands of Lucy and Leo, or Lucy and Leo would die at Boise's hands.

To Hanley, life was cheap.

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Lucy paused in the darkness, listening.

Leo was a dozen yards away, doing the same. They had both been taught how to track down prey and the night only made it easier. In the desert around them, sound travelled remarkably well, especially at night. The runaways were expected to be heading in a westerly direction but they had no idea if that were accurate, nor the exact direction in which they were headed.

The two kids in question were both ten-years-old and very green. They had learnt fast how to fight and both were very fit, but there were significant gaps in their training, which Leo and Lucy would exploit - should they catch up with the runaways. Leo and Lucy had spent time talking together a lot since they were pressed. At first, it had just been idle conversation between two kids getting to know one another, but then they talked about their new lives as *Predators*. They had discussed what they were there for.

Only once had an instructor alluded to their eventual future - as assassins. That had been backed up by their training in knives, shooting, fighting - not just defensive stuff, but offensive stuff

too. They had been taught where on the human body it was beneficial to strike with a knife. The same with where to place a bullet for a quick - or a slow death. Leo had first broached the subject, about two months into their training.

"Luc - could you kill?" he had asked.

"I don't know, Leo," had been the response. "They make it sound so easy . . . but to actually take a life. . .?"

"We'll worry about that when we get there, eh, Luc?"

"A typically English response!" Lucy laughed.

Neither Lucy, nor Leo, were stupid. They both had a shrewd idea that they were being tested - they had learnt enough about *Urban Predator* to know that you had limited opportunities to prove yourselves worthy of continued life.

Should you not prove yourself, you were deemed disposable and 'disposable' meant death.

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The two escapees were quite literally running for their lives. They both knew the penalty for their escape, should they be captured. Neither Robert nor Trina had much of a life to return to. Both had been troubled kids and their parents would not be missing them. A Predator's life was not for them - they wanted to live in peace, not be turned into killers . . . or worse. They had both heard about what had happened to the Palmore girl - a bullet to the temple. That had galvanised them both into action and they had slipped out, earlier that evening. Neither child had any idea that the alarm had been raised, nor who might be sent after them.

They moved as fast as they could go, knowing that they had to put as much distance between them and their former home before daylight revealed them. Fear coursed through them both, each and every time they heard a noise. The desert was full of wildlife and much of that wildlife was out and about that night making noises as it went about its business.

"I need to pee. . ." Trina Carroll whispered to her friend.

"Can't you hold it?" Robert Evans replied.

"No."

"Over there, by that bush, and be quick about it, Trina."

Trina ran over to the bush and she quickly pushed down her joggers and panties. She felt relief as her warm liquid spilled out onto the sand beneath her.

"Hurry, Trina!" Robert whispered as he kept a lookout.

"Okay, I'm done - let's move."

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Fifteen minutes later, Lucy paused beside a bush and she sniffed the air. She knelt down and observed a dark patch of sand which was slowly drying in the coolness of the night.

"Somebody stopped for a pee - a girl, not that long ago," she whispered to Leo.

"You can tell it was a girl?"

"Easy. There are foot prints either side of the pee where the girl crouched down. If it were a boy, the piss would have gone all over the place - you boys insist on waving it around when you go."

"What's wrong with a bit of fun while you wee?" Leo retorted.

"I am not having a conversation about peeing, Leo, ewww! Let's get after those two little shits."

Leo smirked as she started moving again. The two youngsters were firm friends with nothing between them. They had learnt to trust each other, implicitly. Each knew what the other was capable of and when the other needed support . . . or just a shoulder to cry on. The first few months had been miserable and they had both done a lot of crying. They had had only themselves to console each other as they struggled to get through everything which was thrown at them.

It was the very first time that either of them had been entrusted with live weapons. All weapon use was strictly supervised for obvious reasons and generally limited to range use only. They had training devices for use during classes which had no capacity to actually cause anybody any harm - unless you hit them over the head with it, of course!

Leo paused, his ears picking up something. He used hand signals to inform Lucy that he had heard something, a short distance ahead.

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The attack came out of the darkness and the first either of the escapees knew about it was when they found themselves shoved to the ground and then punched into submission.

"Please. . ."

The begging was ignored. Lucy had a hold of Trina and was punching her in the face and chest. The girl was screaming for mercy, but Lucy knew that with Trina's death would come her own elevation in status. She knew no other life than what she had at that moment and she was determined to excel at it - of that was what it took to stay alive. Lucy considered her pistol but she decided that would be too easy and too clinical. Instead, she pulled her knife and while she stared into the panic-stricken eyes below her, she rammed the knife upwards into the abdomen of her prey. Trina stopped struggling as the shock of the intrusion into her body paralysed her for a moment.

Lucy placed a hand over the girl's mouth as she tried to scream. Lucy twisted the blade to the left causing the body beneath her to shake violently before all movement ceased within thirty seconds. Lucy could feel the warm blood seeping into her own clothing and coming into contact with her own skin. The eyes of her prey had shown fear and then pain and maybe betrayal, but then they showed sorrow and then nothing. She stood up, pulling the knife out of the stomach cavity and wiping it off on the dead girl's clothing.

A few yards away, Leo was doing the exact same thing, a dead ten-year-old boy at his feet. Leo had also opted for the more personal kill provided by a knife. He surprised himself by feeling nothing - no remorse, just pride at having completed his mission.

"You ready to call in the cavalry?" Lucy asked as she stowed her knife.

"Make the call, Luc."

Two hours later

That morning was very different for the *Apprentice Predators*.

Everything had changed. There was general unease in the cafeteria as the tired *Predators* entered for their breakfast. The cause of their unease? Lucy - no real surprise; most of the *Predators* were uneasy around the eleven-year-old girl. That morning, though, they were surprised to see the girl fully kitted out for combat, but nonchalantly digging into a full cooked breakfast. She was dirty, her kit was dirty, right down to the sinister black pistol on her right hip. She seemed oblivious to the dried blood on her face and arms. It was the blood which freaked out most of the kids - they knew that there had been an escape attempt in the early hours and it did not require all that much intelligence to figure out why the two senior *Predators* were covered in blood.

Leo sat across from his partner, enjoying his own breakfast. He was just as bloody as Lucy, but he paid it no head. While most of the Phase 1 *Predators* were scared of Lucy, Leo was different. While he was slower to lose his temper, he spent longer considering his actions before he engaged. But when he *did* get angry, you instantly regretted making him angry enough to attack you. He was also fiercely protective of Lucy, not that she needed his protection. Everybody learnt very quickly that you did not say a single word about Lucy in the presence of Leo unless you had a death wish.

Both *Predators* were exhausted after their early morning stroll across the desert. Boise had been very impressed when he had turned up to find the two kids nonchalantly sitting beside a pair of corpses. Boise had made a mental note not to piss off either child as they appeared to both be cold killers. Once his men had loaded the dead children into the Humvee they had headed directly back to the facility. Lucy had dozed off, cuddled up with Leo who catnapped,

keeping a wary eye on Boise and his men while watching over *his* Lucy. Boise also knew that Leo was fiercely protective of Lucy. It was a bit of a joke amongst the instructors, but Leo was very serious about 'his girl'.

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Instructor Millar looked down at the two kids as they ate their breakfast.

"Well done, both of you. Go get yourselves cleaned up - maybe a long hot shower and then get some rest. You are both excused classes today, but SI Hanley wants to debrief you both at four, this afternoon."

"Thank you, sir," Leo replied as he helped Lucy to her feet and they both stumbled back to their rooms.

The two youngsters had no secrets from one another, so the moment they entered their 'apartment', both stripped off their weapons and clothing before they headed into their respective showers. Leo was busy soaping himself down when the bathroom door opened and Lucy entered, naked and still with soap on her body. She pushed her way the shower and sagged down onto the tiled floor. Leo sat down beside his friend. Neither said a word for a minute or two before Lucy spoke up.

"We just killed, Leo. I just killed a ten-year-old girl."

"It scared me, killing that boy - but it was them or us, Luc."

Lucy had obviously been crying - her eyes were very red. She began to sob and she leaned into Leo. Despite Leo's attempts to be strong, especially in front of Lucy, he felt his own tears welling up inside him. They both sat there crying, for almost ten minutes, allowing the hot water to wash away their tears and the blood of their victims which had seeped through their clothing and onto their skin.

For Lucy, it had been the sight of the blood on her tummy - another girl's blood. She had started her shower, but then she felt lonely and she did not want to be alone, so she had just left her shower and run through to Leo. She felt safe when she was with Leo. He had endured everything that she had and they could each relate to each other's fucked up lives. When they had been awoken, about six hours previously, she had been excited about going out into the desert.

"I looked into her eyes. She was so scared - she knew what was going to happen. She begged me to let her go. . ."

Leo wanted to say how he felt, but he could not. He wanted to stay strong for Lucy. He allowed her to cry on his shoulder but then he told her to stand up and he washed her shoulder length blonde hair for her. Lucy just stood there, unable to move as she thought about what she had done that morning. She was only just eleven-years-old, yet she had just taken the life of another child, even though she was still only a child herself. She could tell that Leo was feeling

something similar; she had learnt to read his expressions. She had also seen Leo crying. Leo almost never cried, so that was a sign of his own internal worries, just like hers.

When they had both cleaned off all the blood, sweat, dirt, and sand, they both lay down on the couch together. Leo wrapped his arms around Lucy and they both fell asleep within minutes.

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That night, Leo was not surprised to find Lucy squirming into bed with him. He was glad of her company, not having wanted to go through to Lucy. A girl climbing into a boy's bed for company was deemed okay. A boy climbing into a girl's bed would be seen as something bad.

"Thanks for being there for me, Leo."

"You too, Luc. I'll always be there for you."

They had slept till almost three, that afternoon, when Instructor Millar had awoken them. He had pointed to their lunches which he had left on the table, three hours earlier, then left them alone. He had smiled at them both cuddled up together. They had obviously fallen asleep together after taking showers as both had been loosely wrapped in a white towel each.

Millar did not agree with what was going on - at least not anymore. At first, he had seen it as something workable as only street rats were being selected, or so he thought. The First Predator Intake had had only six street rats out of the eighteen recruits. He had queried where the others had come from, but the good Doctor Hirsch had made some noncommittal remark and sidestepped the question. He had known Lucy and Leo since their very first day as *Predators*, almost nine months previously. He liked the kids; they were full of life and Lucy was a firebrand with a fire inside her that nobody could quench, no matter how hard they tried.

Leo was very different. He was a British boy who was more reserved and less forward than Lucy was. He was slow to anger, but when he was angry, woe betide anybody who got in his way! The boy always smiled and he got on with his studies, causing a lot less trouble than Lucy. The boy was polite and well-mannered. He had some funny habits which most just put down to the fact that he was British. Millar hoped that the two youngsters might survive the CIA's abhorrent attempt at creating master assassins.

If anybody deserved to survive, Lucy and Leo did.

That afternoon

16:00 hours

Senior Instructor Hanley was impressed.

Both eleven-year-olds stood before him, immaculately turned out in white T-shirts with black joggers and dark blue trainers. Lucy's hair was pulled back into a ponytail, high on her head and surprisingly, the usual obnoxious expression was missing, replaced by one of the utmost seriousness.

"Well done, both of you. You both exceeded my expectations of you both. You have both taken a momentous step forwards in your training. As a reward, you will both be given more responsibility and freedom around the facility. Lucy - please do not abuse that extra freedom."

Lucy scowled.

"We know you, Lucy. We know that you like to push your luck. Leo, please help Lucy stay on the right track."

"I'll try, sir, but I cannot guarantee anything."

Senior Instructor Hanley laughed.

"Diplomatic as always, young Leo!"

Leo smiled and so did Lucy which was a surprise. She hated Hanley but so did Leo, only he chose *not* to antagonise the man, unlike his tomboy pal.

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A few hours later, after dinner, the Phase 2 *Predators* were listening to Lucy's Pet Shop Boys album. The current track was her favourite: *It's a Sin*. They both felt a lot better after a good meal and knowing that they had 'exceeded' Senior Instructor Hanley's expectations which in itself was an event so rare as to be almost impossible. Instructor Millar pushed open the door and he grinned at the two smiling youngsters.

"Vehicle garage - now!"

Lucy reluctantly shut off her music then she and Leo followed the instructor to the far side of the facility. By the time Lucy and Leo arrived in the vehicle garage, they found fifteen *Predators* waiting outside the double doors. They, plus Lucy and Leo, were paraded through the doors and into the vehicle garage.

There was stunned silence as the group of ten-year-olds, plus the two eleven-year-olds took in the two dead bodies of their colleagues which had been laid out on a steel-topped table. Both bodies were nude, their clothing having been cut off. The absence of clothing allowed the cause of their deaths to be readily evident - there was a single stab wound in each abdomen and copious amounts of dried blood encrusted the stomach area. The faces of both dead children were bloody and bruised.

"This is what happens should any of you try to escape," Senior Instructor Hanley explained in an even tone.

A few faces turned towards Lucy and Leo. Both of whom stared straight ahead ignoring the body and the appalled looks which they were receiving from their fellow *Predators*.