

Sunday, September 11th, 2016

Chicago, USA

Fusion was embarking to cross the Atlantic.

Equipment and supplies were being loaded aboard a giant Lockheed LM-100J transport aircraft. The equipment had all been loaded into cargo containers suitable for loading into the aircraft's cavernous belly. A lot of the equipment would probably never be used but it was better to have it than not and Mindy did not want to deplete the *Vengeance* equipment reserves unnecessarily.

After much soul-searching, Dave and Mindy had chosen to leave the twins with Marcus and Paige. Stephanie would be travelling, of course, as would Saoirse, Abby, Chloe, Joshua, and Mathilda. They would all fly out on the Gulfstream a few hours after the Lockheed transport which flew at half the speed of the executive jet.

Three hours before departure, Mindy received an urgent call to go see *Synthesis* at their facility. Naturally, with a lot still to arrange, Mindy was not happy.

Synthesis Data Facility

"This had better be good!" Hit Girl growled.

Libby turned to face the purple-clad vigilante queen and she swallowed deeply before she spoke.

"I was talking with Q and, well, we had an idea. . ."

"Spit it out, girl!"

"Back in early June, there was a gunfight in the English seaside town of Whitby - it ended up on YouTube."

Libby clicked on a button and on one of the large screens, a video began to play. The video was entitled: 'Young boy shoots man on Whitby street'. As Mindy watched, she saw an image of the Yorkshire fishing town on the west coast of England.

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The sun was shining and it looked like a typical family video. Until . . .

A young boy could be seen looking down the street, then he dived flat to the floor and several pistol shots were heard. The boy reached into his pack and he produced a small pistol. Very quickly, he came up into a kneeling stance and very calmly, he began to return fire. His smaller pistol issued sharper cracks compared to the heavier booms of the opposition's weapons.

The camera had moved to show three adults, each with large pistols evident in their hands. One, a woman, dived into cover behind a

parked van. A man followed suit but the third member received two bullets to his chest and he went down hard. The boy showed no fear, nor any remorse, as he emptied his magazine towards the adults before calmly reloading and running towards the swing-bridge across the water. He just made it to the other side before the bridge began to open for an approaching boat.

Screams and sirens could be heard as people dove for cover. The young boy was last seen running into the narrow streets of Whitby.

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"Holy shit!" Mindy murmured.

"Yeah - not your average event on a sunny afternoon in an English town."

"More like Chicago on a Saturday night!" Mindy commented dryly.

"Well, after witnessing that attack on Scorpio, in London, we began to do some thinking. . ."

Libby paused as Hit Girl began to growl.

"Look - we're not stupid; I assume you would not have recruited us if we were," Libby said and she visibly breathed a sigh of relief when Hit Girl nodded and then waved for her to continue. "Those kids were amazing - they were also really violent. We heard the term, 'predator' in relation to them, so we assumed that they were some highly trained kids - you know, like that girl in Stranger Things."

"Go on."

"Well - seeing the way those kids fought; well, it kind of reminded me of that boy in the video. So, I got to thinking - the video was crap; always is from phones and when caught on the fly. We did what we could to acquire a clean image of the boy's face and body - the results were poor, but Kate and Laurence managed to clean things up and they were able to obtain height, approximate weight, and some very crude facial stats. Kate?"

"Err yeah, we started searching cached CCTV in London - never mind how! We got a hit, about three hours ago - then another, and another."

"Okay," Hit Girl said. "Show me what you got."

A grainy image appeared on the screen - it was early morning, but Mindy could make out a young boy and an older girl standing on a busy street. Then another image appeared beside it. It was of better quality than the first and it appeared to have been taken in a parking lot late morning. The image showed a boy and a girl - it wasn't a perfect match, but they could be the same pair.

"We identified the motorcycle that they were riding. We were able to access the motorway camera network that the Brits use to track licence plates. We found several hits on the plate - they were

heading west. They also came back about a week later - heading east before we lost them about sixty miles west of London."

"Very good, *Synthesis!*"

"You can pass on the details to Battle Guy, but for now, where did the go?"

"Blandford Forum - a market town."

That same time

Blandford Forum, England

There had been six deliveries over a period of four hours.

The British Army Foden DROPS trucks had deposited six containerised loads side-by-side before disappearing. One of the flatbed containers contained two fuel tanks - petrol and diesel. Five identical Range Rover Sentinels were also delivered and they were parked undercover behind the containers.

The site was an MI5 Safehouse and it was currently being occupied by the *Vengeance* forward unit which consisted of Eric, Natasha, and Abigail. Together, they inventoried all the supplies and they ensured that everything was ready for the arrival of *Fusion*. Nothing was overlooked - Eric of course ensured that Abby would have the required secure internet connectivity as well as readying one of their drones for a reconnaissance mission. Back in London, Commander Lawrence and Jasper were busy deconflicting the *Vengeance/Fusion* activities to ensure that there would be no interference from the military, nor the local police.

That, in itself, was dangerous as nobody knew how far *Scorpio* might have the local police penetrated. Commander Lawrence had to assume that *Scorpio* would be fully integrated with local law enforcement so no local police were notified, however, the Home Office was prepared to intervene should the police report any potential terrorist activity in the West Country. It would not do for any blue on blue strikes nor did HMG wish to publicise the fact that they were actively allowing vigilante activity within UK borders.

It was also very important to ensure that the press did not get wind of Chicago's own vigilante queen causing havoc in a sleepy part of England.

Monday, September 12th

MI5 Safehouse

Blandford Forum

It was something which always amazed both Cassie and Keira.

The giggly little girls who were always out to cause trouble were totally different when they were deployed as their not-so-alter egos. From eight-year-old Kaitlin to twelve-year-old Craig, there was one hundred percent concentration.

Keira had just driven in with Harper and Craig, both of whom had flown down to their temporary base at Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton. *Twilight* was stored out of sight in a hanger beside helicopters which were much more familiar to the ex-Royal Navy pilot. The helicopter was also being transformed into its attack guise under the guidance of The Chief who was very pleased to be back in his former surroundings.

Harper and Craig got on amazingly well - Keira had been forced to listen to an hour's worth of conversation which had covered the internals of various machineguns and the benefits of a closed-bolt design over an open-bolt design. A conversation which Keira had found both very boring and one which was very odd for a nine-year-old girl and a twelve-year-old boy to be engaged in.

The *Predators* were in the dining room, busy checking through all the weapons and loading magazines. They were very skilled and efficient at it too. The conversation was limited and only relevant to the task at hand.

"Maybe we should have them servicing weapons and loading magazines 24-7," Cassie quipped.

"Would give us a peaceful life," Keira agreed.

Kaitlin barely looked up from her magazine filling.

"A couple of murders would give us a peaceful life too," she muttered to nobody in particular.

Before Cassie could respond to Kaitlin's suggestion, there was a commotion from outside the Safehouse. Cameron peeked his head into the dining room.

"They're here!" he called out before vanishing.

Harper, Naomi, Kaitlin, Electra, Abigail, and Yvette bolted out of the room like they were being chased by the hounds of hell. Craig shrugged and followed on more sedately.

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Parked up outside were two extra vehicles.

There was a large 26-foot Euro6 curtain-sider truck with a Mercedes cab and a Mercedes V-Class MPV. Dave was climbing down from the truck along with Mathilda. Out of the MPV came Stephanie, Saoirse, Abby, Chloe, and Joshua. Mindy climbed out of the driver's seat.

"You allowed Mindy to drive?" Natasha quipped.

"Hi, Nats!" Mindy laughed as she gave her friend a hug.

Naturally, all the female *Predators* began screaming and they each dived onto Stephanie and Saoirse. Saoirse was unused to the big welcomes which Stephanie seemed to attract and she looked a little freaked out as she was hugged by each girl in turn. Abby, of course, appeared to vanish along with Eric. Keira studied Chloe but Joshua just shook his head and Keira left it for later - she could tell that something was wrong.

After everybody had finished enjoying the welcoming ceremony, Stephanie took Abigail and Electra off to one side. Electra knew what was coming and her expression showed it.

"You going to kick our arses?" Abigail asked.

"I should - when I heard about what you two did, I wanted to come over here and tear you both apart."

"We worked out our differences and while we're not exactly fucking each other, we're not fucking each other over either," Electra commented with a smile.

"You really do have a way with words, 'lectra!" Stephanie laughed. "Just stay friends, that's all I ask."

"We're working on it," Abigail said as she put an arm around Electra and hugged her.

Electra cringed.

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"It's good to be together, again," Dave said as he sat down with Cameron and Joshua.

The *Predators*, including Stephanie and Saoirse, had gone back to preparing the weapons. Chloe was off with Mindy and Cassie checking out the truckload of cargo while Keira was helping Mathilda with her personal weapons. Abby and Eric were conspicuous by their absence although the *Vengeance* Command Van known as *Cyclone* appeared to be moving around a bit on its suspension.

Once all the equipment was unpacked and passed onto the *Predator* production line for further checks, Mindy and Cassie went for a ride on a pair of Triumph Tiger Explorer XCA motorcycles. Mindy was in her element as she raced around the narrow lanes many of which were sunken and the tops of the hedges were several feet above them. They passed through Tarrant Rawston and then rode past the old World War II RAF airfield at Tarrant Rushton. At Witchampton, they stopped to check out the access roads to what they were calling 'Scorpio Satellite Site B'.

The location sucked as far as making a covert assault was concerned. Any assault would have to execute after dark and on foot. Any vehicles approaching would be heard a mile away. Images from a high-flying drone, EAGLE-1, had revealed many heat blooms indicating upwards of thirty occupants on the site. The nine buildings were a

mixture of old and new and were primarily on the north side of the almost eleven-acre site. Nobody had any idea if it would be all gunmen, or kids being held against their will - or something else.

A quick ride up the A3078 with a left at the Horton Inn, took Mindy and Cassie down some excellent roads as they headed north-west. Naturally, Mindy got a bit ahead of herself and she put the 1,215cc 3-cylinder engine through its paces, racing along the narrow lanes at over seventy miles-per-hour. They slowed down as they approached the small village of Tollard Royal and what they were calling 'Scorpio Satellite Site A'.

Site A was a large manor house dating back to the 1800s. It would be a very difficult place to assault but it was doable. Both Mindy and Cassie agreed with earlier ideas that the assault would be best with helicopter support. They had *Twilight*, however, a second helicopter would have been useful, but *Scourge* was not ready and they did not have a second combat pilot anyway. Drone imagery had also identified the presence of a Storm Grey McLaren 675LT parked outside the building and the tracker which Abigail had been placed on William Fraser was still functioning and it indicated his presence at the site.

There was a lot of planning to complete.

MI5 Safehouse

The return of Mindy and Cassie signalled dinner time and then bedtime.

The kids were sent to bed once they had all been fed - they would all need their energy for the next twenty-four hours which promised to be exciting. The accommodations that night were tight to be fair but the kids were used to it. Harper was sharing a room with Craig.

"I hope you two won't be screaming like Cassie does when she has sex," Kaitlin commented as she walked past the door to their bedroom.

"Kaitlin - shut the fuck up!" Harper growled as Craig's cheeks went red.

"Why else would a boy share a room with a girl?" Kaitlin asked innocently.

"Because there's no space anywhere also, you dumb fuck!" Naomi advised her cousin.

"There's no need for bad language," Kaitlin retorted as she vanished down to the room which she was sharing with Abigail, Electra, Yvette, and Naomi.

The following afternoon
Tuesday, September 13th

Scorpio Satellite Site B

The facility was of a very utilitarian nature but the landscaping had been completed well, thus blending the site into the surrounding countryside.

Shadow and Hal had been studying the site from a distance using high-powered optics. It was forbidding, but it had been deemed that two people could slip in and hopefully out without any significant issues. They needed intel and intel was what they were there to acquire. Shadow would get them both in, and then Hal would go to work on the Scorpio computer systems with remote help from *Synthesis*. High above them, the \$3million ScanEagle X200 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) known as EAGLE-1 flew in a large racetrack pattern. The 22kg aircraft with its three-metre wingspan and 1.5-horsepower engine flew at 60 knots and was capable of remaining airborne for over twenty-four hours. The high-definition cameras were aimed at Site B and they were watching the area to help guide the two vigilantes inside the facility.

Then they found an ally as the heaven's opened, drenching the Wiltshire countryside in sheets of freezing icy rain. The vision suddenly dropped to mere yards instead of the half-a-mile that they had enjoyed only minutes previously. They both jumped up and ran forwards. They had a thousand yards to cover over two muddy fields, not that it was a problem for the two ultra-fit vigilantes. Both wore their Fusion Covert Combat Suits, complete with masks, under British MTP camouflage clothing. As they ran across the fields, they were quickly covered in mud and soaked, but their skin stayed dry thanks to the combat suit which let sweat out but prevented the rain getting in.

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Shadow raised her clenched fist and Hal stopped dead. Directly ahead of them was a hedge, beyond that hedge were two long buildings - the first of Site B. On closer inspection, the hedge was concealing security measures and if they had simply blundered through, then they would have triggered off alarms and . . .

"Is that a fucking Claymore?" Hal demanded.

Shadow nodded as she pointed out the trip wire and the detonation device. Shadow sent an image of the device back to Q who would add the intel to the burgeoning stack of intel back at the Safehouse. Shadow disabled the detonation device and they moved through the hedge and stopped beside the first building. There were no visible windows in the sides of the building so Shadow led the way down the side towards the front of the building.

The building had a sign on the door - 'Generator' - another image was sent to Q as Shadow picked the simple Yale lock and eased open the door.

That same time

MI5 Safehouse

"Welcome!"

"You must be Hit Girl," the man said as he took the offered hand.

"You must be Astute."

"Thank you for allowing me to join your team."

"We want to get your daughter back, and I need to find my daughter's brother," Mindy replied.

"I understand you've tracked them down?"

"We think so."

Patrick Millar looked around the room and he took in the nine kids. His face went very serious as he realised what they were.

"I know you," the eldest girl stated.

"Saoirse Doherty - Second Intake."

Mindy frowned.

"Instructor Millar was there when I was taken. He was there when we were stripped naked and we had our hair cut off," Saoirse explained.

"I remember every kid who was there while I was and I can only apologise, Saoirse. I believed in *Urban Predator* when it was just Lucy and Leo - they were street rats given a new life. Then they began taking kids like you - kidnapping you and forcing you into a different life. Lucy and Leo had no life, no future; you did - as did you all."

There were a lot of glares from the kids' present once they realised that they had an *Urban Predator* instructor amongst them. Saoirse noticed and she moved in between the lynch mob and their target.

"Leave him alone," she ordered. "Instructor Millar was never cruel. He looked after everybody there, when he could. I hated him at first, just like the rest; they had humiliated me and taken away my individuality. But then a scared ten-year-old found that there was somebody who would listen when things got too much. Somebody who would stand up for our welfare. I know that Leo and Lucy both spoke highly of him. You guys want to lynch him then you're going to have to go through me."

"Did you know, Mindy?" Abigail asked.

"Yes, I did. He was vouched for. The girl currently running with Jamie? Shannon is Patrick's daughter."

"They took her when I rebelled against them. I was being transferred - Shannon got angry and she stormed out to let off some steam. That was in 2011; I never saw her again."

"Shannon Millar?" Saoirse asked.

"Yes."

"I remember her but I never made the connection," Saoirse said. "She came in out of sequence; three months after the rest of her intake. She received harsher treatment compared to the rest of us. They stripped her in the vehicle garage and marched her naked through the facility to the showers where she had her head shaved in front of everybody. She sobbed for three days straight - she was so scared. She was beaten badly, several times during her first month. Now it makes sense; they were punishing her for what you did."

"Thank you for telling me that, Saoirse. I know how much you must all resent me and what I represent. Where is Stephanie?"

Stephanie raised her hand.

"I spent many weeks in contact with Miranda and she talked about you. She was a very courageous woman and I'm sorry she died."

"Thanks," Stephanie said and she held out her hand to the man.

He hesitated, unsure of taking the hand.

"We all have scars. We all have things we did. We all have regrets. We've all been given a second chance and we need to embrace that," Stephanie stated as she resolutely held out her hand.

Patrick Millar took it and he shook it.

"Welcome to the club, Mr Millar," Saoirse grinned.

Scorpio Satellite Site B

The generator building, unsurprisingly, held a large generator.

However, that was not all. Hal was pleased to see a computer terminal which was patch into a cabled network connection. While Shadow kept a lookout, Hal set to work hacking into the Scorpio network. It did not take long and she was able to connect up a small wireless interface which would then allow Synthesis to connect into the network from Chicago.

Hal ensured that her freshly installed equipment was not visible before she and Shadow made their way back outside and back into the driving rain. They had only moved a dozen yard before there was movement close by and a rain-soaked guard appeared from around the next block. Shadow seized him and threw him down into the mud,

punching him hard in the face with her armoured gauntlets. The man was out cold before he even knew that Shadow and Hal were there. But before they could gain entry to the next block, the rain began to lift and they heard a challenge from across the compound.

"Command - contact, contact, contact!" Shadow radioed.

Shadow then snapped off a bullet in the direction of the challenge and she dove behind the block with Hal beside her.

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Their presence was most unwelcome, but not all that unexpected, it seemed. People began to spill out of the blocks. Most of them were armed and bullets began to fly. Shadow and Hal were both lightly armed - it was only supposed to be a stealthy infiltration, after all! But there were not unsupported - not by a long shot.

The long shot came out of the rain and a guard fell backwards into the mud, a large hole in his chest. Another guard ran over to check his colleague - his head exploded as the .50-calibre BMG round passed through and continued on for another few hundred yards. Eighty metres away, Leon adjusted her aim for the next target of opportunity. Leon had a personal hatred for people who targeted children and she felt no remorse as she coldly dropped another guard.

Something caught Shadow's eye across the far side of the compound. It appeared to be a young girl - not altogether a surprise - but the girl was very small. Before she could move, she heard several yells and the guards began to withdraw, running back to several parked four-wheel-drive vehicles. They were obviously bugging out in the face of superior fire-power. The mere presence of an unseen but very deadly sniper was enough to scare the crap out of anybody. Three vehicles vanished down the muddy track. The last vehicle, however, deviated from the course of the other vehicles.

Shadow looked on in horror as the Land Rover drove directly at the little girl with the obvious intention of killing her; she was evidence, after all.

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Shadow yelled out a warning but the little girl had already reacted with lightning speed. A very impressed Shadow watched as the girl dropped to the swirling muddy torrent at her feet and balled herself as tight as possible, like a peanut, and the large 4x4 drove directly over her with barely an inch of clearance. Shadow bolted forwards with Hal beside her and they both emptied their pistols at the retreating vehicle. Shadow smiled with undisclosed pleasure as she registered a large dark smudge which appeared on the windshield and the Land Rover careered into a concrete wall, rebounding and then stopping against a parked car.

Shadow ejected her empty magazine and inserted a fresh one, as did Hal. As she did that, she ran forward and quickly scooped the little peanut out of the mud and into her arms.

"You alright, peanut?" Shadow asked.

The little girl looked up at Shadow out of her pale brown eyes. She brushed the wet hair out of eyes and she smiled. Then she frowned.

"My name is Becky, not 'peanut'!"

Shadow laughed at the fiery, indignant response.

"You okay, Becky?"

"Yeah - that was scary."

"Let's get you some place safe, okay?"

The girl's smile vanished and tears began to fall.

"I have nowhere to go."

"Oh, yes, you do, honey. You wanna come home with me?"

The smile returned, but the tears remained.

"Can I?"

"Of course, Peanut. Is there anybody else here?"

Becky shook her head, "No."

Shadow wiped away the little girl's tears which seemed just a little bit redundant considering the pounding rain which soaked the little girl's skin and she headed out to the RV Point with Hal protecting their rear.

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Fifty yards to the north of the site, Hal popped a smoke grenade and threw it a few yards away. While the smoke was all but invisible in the rain, the heat-bloom from the grenade's chemical reaction blossomed onto Scorpion's Forward Looking Infra-Red (FLIR) display and she dived *Twilight* down through the rain.

"Standby for pickup, Chief!" Scorpion ordered.

Aft of her, in the main cabin, Chief Montgomery checked his safety harness before he pulled back both side doors and latched them open. He picked up a Heckler & Koch G36K short submachine gun and prepared for the extraction. Through the NVGs mounted on his flight helmet, he could make out three people - one much smaller than the other two - awaiting pick up. Scorpion was seconds away from placing *Twilight* down beside Shadow and Hal when The Chief issued an urgent warning.

"Pilot, Crewman - trouble inbound at ten o'clock!"

Scorpion abandoned the landing and she spun the helicopter around on its axis, arming the weapons systems as she went.

"Shadow, Hal - aborting pickup; un-friendlies inbound - take cover while we prosecute, Scorpion out!"

Shadow and Hal flattened themselves on the ground with Shadow on top of Becky. Scorpion lined up *Twilight* and she prepared to attack the three approaching vehicles. As the aiming reticule in her visor adjusted under the control of the firing computer, Scorpion steadied the aircraft and then just as the reticule passed onto the target, she flipped up the cover on the guns button just above her right thumb.

With that simple movement, Scorpion fired off *Twilight's* first ever war shots.

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The helicopter had not been visible as it had closed but Shadow and Hal had both heard the turbines and rotor blades. *Twilight* had been in full combat mode with no visible illumination on the aircraft helping the dark grey helicopter to blend into the driving rain. Just before it had aborted the landing, Shadow had taken in the helicopter's latest guise.

Twin pods were mounted, one on either side of the fuselage. Each held a 12.7mm (.50-calibre) FN M3P machinegun which was capable of firing 1,200 rounds-per-minute with each pod holding 250-rounds. Mounted under each pod were three launch tubes for three 2.75-inch unguided HE rockets.

Shadow's immediate thought was how deadly the helicopter looked but then she almost jumped out of her body armour as a single burst of machinegun fire leapt from each pod-mounted .50-calibre weapon. As far as Shadow was concerned, the sound was stupendous. It was also extremely accurate as a dozen bullets cut into the bonnet of the first Land Rover, destroying the engine and killing two of the four men on board.

The other two vehicles rapidly performed one-eighties and roared off back down the track.

"Shadow, Hal - target prosecuted; *Twilight* inbound for pickup - forty seconds!"

"Copy that, *Twilight*," Shadow replied as she stood back up, pulling Becky with her.

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As *Twilight* came around into the wind, The Chief resumed his position ready for a combat pick up. Scorpion brought the helicopter in fast, flaring at the last second and dropping the undercarriage. The helicopter settled into a hover, three feet off the ground - she did not want to get the tyres muddy! While Hal kept watch, Shadow threw Becky up to The Chief who shoved her firmly into a seat - niceties could be observed once clear of the combat zone. The Chief then reached down and he hauled Hal up into the helicopter followed

by Shadow who quickly grabbed hold of a second H&K G36G and took post at the open port door. The Chief did the same as he contacted Scorpion.

"Pilot, crewman - team aboard; clear to depart!"

"Acknowledged!" Scorpion responded as she firewalled the engines and pulled up on the collective, pushing forwards the cyclic.

Twilight rapidly accelerated forwards and upwards, gathering speed and quickly passing one hundred knots. Scorpion was very pleased to be moving skyward; a helicopter's transition from the hover to forward flight was its most dangerous when in a combat zone. Once clear of the ground, Scorpion altered course to the west and within minutes the sound of turbines and churning rotors vanished from the area.

The Chief closed both side doors and everybody settled into their seats for the ride to safety.

MI5 Safehouse

Scorpion set *Twilight* down behind some trees to one side of the Safehouse and dropped off Chloe and Becky - Hal, Scorpion, and the Chief still had a lot of work to do.

When Shadow entered the otherwise empty Safehouse, she sat Becky down on a couch in the living room. Shadow pulled off her mask and smiled down at the youngster.

"I'm going to get cleaned up and changed, then I'll sort you out, okay?"

Chloe turned and she headed for her room but before she could move more than a foot, she felt a small hand inside her own. Chloe looked down and she saw the scared look.

"Let's go, Peanut."

In the bedroom, she placed Becky on the bed and moved towards the bathroom. Becky was slipping off the bed before Chloe had made it to the door, just a few feet away.

"Can't I shower in peace?"

The look Chloe received, said 'no'. Luckily, the bathroom had both a bath and a separate shower, so Chloe ran a bath for Becky - there were no bubbles, so soap would have to do. While the water was running, Chloe pushed Becky back into the bedroom.

"Get undressed and I'll dump you in the bath."

Becky quickly began to shed her clothes. The little girl's face was covered in cuts and bruises, as well as mud, so Chloe should not have been all that surprised to find out that the child had many more which had previously been covered up by her clothing. As Becky

revealed more and more skin, Chloe got angrier and angrier: almost every square-inch of the eight-year-old's body had a mark of some sort on it. Her neck, chest, stomach, legs, back, and her backside itself showed evidence of her having taken a beating, recently too. There were numerous cuts, some healed over. The poor girl had obviously been abused over her entire time as a trainee *Predator*.

Chloe's heart went out to the little girl as she was lowered gently into the hot water. Becky cried out as her fresher injuries touched the water and Chloe had never felt so horrible inside. How could *anybody* do such a thing to such a sweet little girl? Chloe so hoped that Vossen and his pals were having a really good time in hell and if she had her way, they would be gaining a colleague!

Once Becky was busy soaping herself, Chloe stripped off and dived into the shower. She was very glad of the water as it washed away the tears that she hoped Becky had not seen.

Meanwhile. . .

The A354 west of Tarrant Hinton

The girl was frozen.

Her clothing was soaked and the rain was unrelenting. She had never felt so cold. She had no idea where she was going nor what she was going to do once she got there. She had nobody, she was alone. Who could she contact? Her mind was a muddle - she couldn't think straight. That little girl kept popping into her mind alongside Jamie. Both were at risk. The little girl meant nothing to Shannon - but the little girl had killed for her; she was obviously a *Predator*, so she deserved to live, to survive. Only, Shannon would have to survive first and then find help before she could return to help that little girl - and rescue Jamie.

Shannon shivered as a gust of wind blew *through* her clothing. In seven weeks, she would be fourteen-years-old - but right at that moment, she was beginning to think that she would not live that long, and real tears of both fear and failure joined the torrent of rain which flooded across her face. Then she paused and her *Predator* training came back to the fore as she heard a deadly sound - an approaching helicopter.

The girl dove into the mud beside a hedge which ran alongside the road.

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"*Hit Girl, I have a heat signature, a mile ahead of you - it's hiding behind a hedge to your right,*" Scorpion radioed.

"Copy that, Scorpion, thanks," Hit Girl replied.

The five-vehicle convoy was headed east at speed towards the Scorpio Satellite Site A. Hit Girl was in the front passenger seat of the

leading vehicle while Kick-Ass was driving. Behind her sat Psyche, Stripe, and Rigour. In the vehicle behind, Jackal drove with Foxtail beside her. In the rear seat were three very eager young girls: Prowl, Polaris, and Glide. The rear vehicle had Drift at the wheel with Nemesis beside him. In the rear seat were Fury, and La Terreur.

The fourth vehicle: the command van, followed the three Range Rover Sentinels with Q at the wheel and Hal in the rear with her equipment. The intelligence obtained by Hal had also included access to certain systems at Site A. *Synthesis* were busy hacking in at that moment and passing across whatever they found to Hal.

The fifth vehicle was tail-end-Charlie and was being driven by Crimson with Astute in the seat beside her.

Scorpion kept the heat signature visible as the convoy closed. Her immediate job was to prevent any ambush on the combined *Fusion/Vengeance* attack force.

"Target is sixty yards on the right," Scorpion radioed.

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The convoy slowed and stopped as the vehicles took up tactical positions - the two rear-most Sentinels guarding the command van. Hit Girl climbed out of the Sentinel, her SIG Sauer MPX-K raised ahead of her. Kick-Ass covered her with an identical weapon. Hit Girl leapt over a wooden five-bar gate and quickly levelled her weapon at the dark shape huddled under the hedge. With a slight movement of her finger, a dazzling light illuminated the target.

"Hi, there, my name is Hit Girl - you would not, by any chance, be called, Stormtide?"

Stormtide raised her hand against the dazzling light, temporarily blinded. Her senses and training ordered her to react, but the electronically synthesised voice had scared her and the young girl had nothing left to resist with. Throughout her training, she had been told that one day, Hit Girl may come for her life. That day had come and she was going to die without ever seeing Jamie again.

"I am Stormtide - were you sent to kill me?"

Hit Girl laughed.

"No, I came to rescue you. There are is somebody in particular who is desperate to see you."

"Shannon!"

Shannon's head came up and she turned to the voice.

"Oh, my God - I never thought the day would come," Patrick Millar said as he emerged from the rain and he laid eyes on his daughter properly for the first time in five years.

"Daddy?"

It had been many years, but she still recognised her father's voice. The thirteen-year-old girl broke down and she sobbed as her father hugged her tightly. Nemesis came over and she helped the sobbing, shivering girl into the waiting Range Rover. But Stormtide stopped and she turned to Hit Girl.

"You gotta help him - he is alone; please."

"Help who?"

"Rage - they're gonna kill him."

*This storyline continues in **Chapter 20: Jamie of Predator** as well as simultaneously in **Chapter 23: LV-426 of Vengeance** and **Chapter 327: Scorpio Satellite Site A of Forsaken**.*