

**Author's Note:** *This is the continuation of the storyline from Chapter 21: A Bonus Twist of Predator as well as of Chapter 23: LV-426 of Vengeance.*

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***That night***

***Tuesday, September 13<sup>th</sup>***

***Chicago, USA***

***Sky News Excerpt***

*". . . Reports of black helicopters flying over the West Country, today, were compounded by additional reports of armed helicopters operating, both in the West Country and in the South, around the Southampton Container Terminal. Eye-witnesses in Southampton reported the presence of a Royal Navy Mk6 Seaking helicopter that was operating a machine gun over marshland, just to the south of the terminal. A representative from the Ministry of Defence, speaking on behalf of the Admiralty, advised that the Royal Navy 'no longer operates the Seaking Mk6 operationally', so it could not have been one of their helicopters . . ."*

Marcus growled.

"I hear things like that and I see purple!"

"Just Mindy letting off some steam," Megan suggested.

"Has Mom done something bad?" Anne-Marie asked.

"One of these days, the Brits are going to throw her into the Tower of London and throw away the key!" Marcus muttered dryly.

"Let the girl have some fun!" Paige offered coolly.

"At least she doesn't seem to have blown anything up," Danny said.

"Yet!" Marcus growled.

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***MI5 Safehouse***

***Blandford Forum, England***

Joshua discovered that he had a *lot* to get his head around by the time he returned to the Safehouse.

He had been aware that Chloe had managed to get herself into a solo action chasing after a young *Predator*. He was also very concerned as to her motivations behind that chase. Chloe had returned to the Safehouse just fifteen minutes after Joshua. She was a mess - there was no other way to put it. Between the face paint, the gun smoke, and the general dirt, he barely recognised his girlfriend. Standing beside Chloe, as she had entered the living room, had been a similarly dirty little girl. Chloe had hugged Joshua for what seemed

ages until they had both heard somebody clearing their throat in a rather annoyed fashion.

Chloe looked down to find a very disapproving eight-year-old and she grinned.

"Joshua, please meet Rebecca. Peanut, please meet my boyfriend, Joshua."

"Hi, Rebecca," Joshua said as he crouched down to Becky's height.

"I prefer: Becky."

"I prefer: Josh."

Becky smiled.

"Hi, Josh."

"Hi, Becky. Not: Peanut?"

"Becky. Only Chloe is allowed to call me that."

Chloe gave Joshua her best smug expression.

"Okay, I can respect that," Joshua replied before he gave Chloe a very pointed look. "May I speak with you?"

Chloe nodded with a resigned expression on her face and she followed her boyfriend towards the bedroom which they shared. Joshua noticed Becky following.

"Alone!" he said pointedly and Becky nodded with some reluctance.

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Joshua closed the bedroom door behind them both before turning to Chloe.

"You've become attached to that girl, am I right?"

"Yes - I have become very attached," Chloe replied honestly.

"I want to be sure that you are doing this for the right reasons, Chloe. Rebecca is not a replacement for our baby."

"No, Joshua, Rebecca is not a replacement for our baby. Nothing can ever replace our baby. Yes, I feel a loss inside of me - both physically and psychologically. I miss having our baby growing inside of me. I miss dreaming of how we might bring up our child. Yes, I want to take care of Rebecca - the little girl has been through a lot. I'm getting close to her because I see some of myself in her. I am not doing it just because I lost my baby a few days ago."

Chloe was bristling for a fight and her expression dared Joshua to speak out of turn. But he knew his Chloe; he knew her very well. He knew that while she was goading him, he had been goading her to find out how Chloe was really feeling inside. He had his answer.

"I'm behind you, Chloe," he stated, simply.

Chloe hugged him tightly.

"Are you okay? Any injuries?"

"A few cuts, many bruises - and a flesh wound from a bullet, otherwise, I'm fine - just very sore; I don't think I'm ready for all this physical shit yet. Lucky Mindy sent me on an easy mission, huh?"

"You two finished, or are you both about to engage in sexual intercourse."

Joshua stared down at the little girl who had snuck into the bedroom without either of them noticing.

"Peanut - bath - now!" a red-faced Chloe ordered and the cheeky little eight-year-old saluted with a broad grin.

"Aye, aye, Shadow!"

Joshua laughed as the little girl vanished into the bathroom for her second bath that day.

"You need a bath, too, Shadow - you stink!" Joshua chuckled as he took in the face paint and other crap on his girlfriend's body. "We can check out your wounds, too."

"How about you help me with Becky - maybe wash her hair?" Chloe suggested.

Joshua knew that there was more to Chloe's simple suggestion but he let that slide.

"You okay with that, Peanut?" Chloe asked as a mostly naked Becky appeared at the bathroom door.

"You'll get no complaints from me - I *assume* he's seen a girl naked before."

"Congratulations, Chloe; you've found a total nutcase - but I suppose it takes a nut to find a nut!" Joshua complained as Chloe grinned sheepishly.

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Once Chloe had run the bath for Becky - she had added copious amounts of bubbles (Spook had managed to obtain some urgent shopping to replace that which had been destroyed when the Sentinel had been blow up) which Becky was happily playing with - she stripped off and dived into the shower. Joshua's expression while Becky had climbed into the bath had turned very dark indeed. He had taken in all the cuts and bruises which occupied most of the girl's small body. He looked over at Chloe who returned his dark look as she carefully cleaned her leg wound.

"From this moment on, Becky, you will always be safe," Joshua said in a calm tone as he began to wash the little girl's long brown hair.

Nobody spoke much as Chloe and Becky washed. After Joshua, had finished with Becky's hair, he started work on her face which was covered in God only knew what.

"Oh, oh, I made a clean spot here; now I've done it. Guess I'll have to do the whole thing!"

He soaped a washcloth and very gently he began to clean her face, starting from her forehead and working down each side.

"Hard to believe there's a little girl under all this! A pretty one, too."

Becky giggled and she smiled up at Joshua for a moment, before her hand slapped a good amount of bubbles onto his face. Becky laughed out loud as Joshua spluttered - Chloe caught the exchange and she laughed too as she worked at cleaning the gunk off her own face. Joshua growled as he came across a fresh wound on Becky's forehead, not to mention the vivid bruise on the side of her face.

"That looks like it hurts."

"Not really," Becky replied bravely. "It's just a graze; I've had worse."

Joshua's expression was grim, but he let her comments pass. After another few minutes, Joshua held out a towel for the much cleaner Becky, who stood up and allowed Joshua to wrap the towel tightly around her body. He lifted the little girl out of the bath and she wrapped both arms around his neck before bursting into tears.

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Joshua carried the eight-year-old through to the bedroom and he sat down on the bed, hugging the girl tightly.

"What's wrong, sweetie?"

"I'm just glad it's all over . . . it *is* over, right?" Becky asked.

"It is, sweetie. You will never need to experience anything bad, ever again," Joshua said soothingly as Chloe joined them, wrapped in a towel.

"You will never be alone, Peanut - no matter what you choose," said as she joined the hug.

"Can I stay with you two?"

"If that is what you want, then we will do everything we can to make that happen, sweetie," Chloe offered as Joshua nodded. "You ready to go meet everybody?"

Becky looked up at Chloe and the eight-year-old rolled her eyes.

"Like this? I'd rather get dressed first," she suggested with a smile.

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Mindy was observing her teams as they all unwound and cleaned themselves up after the intensive combat mission.

There had been a rotation of sorts as combat suits were removed and weapons were cleared, then people drifted off to the bathrooms to shower or take baths. Everybody was tired, but they all had tasks to perform before they could settle down and rest.

"Fucking *Predators!*" Cassie growled as she stormed out of one of the bathrooms, her T-shirt very wet. She looked over at Mindy. "Harper thought it a good idea to save time by sharing a bath with Electra and Abigail - not one of her best ideas! Naomi and Kaitlin aren't exactly helping, neither."

Mindy laughed, glad that there was some humour drifting around - even if it was dark humour, or just generally being an ass. Mindy was one of the last to go and shower, along with Dave - they always checked on her underlings first. After the refreshing shower, she returned to the living room. Mindy was concerned about her two senior Lieutenants. Chloe had suffered a devastating blow, only days previously. In turn, Mindy had offered her the easiest mission possible, knowing that Shadow would not willingly restrict herself to a non-combat operation. Mindy had caught sight of the little girl as Chloe had brought her in. Mindy had also seen Joshua's expression and Mindy knew that Chloe and Joshua would be having a serious heart-to-heart.

Mindy smiled as Chloe came out of the bedroom, followed by the little girl - now dressed in brand new, clean clothing - and Joshua. They steered directly for Mindy and also Dave who had appeared from his shower.

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"Dave, Mindy - please meet Rebecca Wren; she prefers to be called Becky."

"Hello, Becky," Dave said with a reassuring grin.

"Hi, Becky," Mindy added.

"Becky, this is Dave and Mindy."

Becky studied Dave and Mindy for a few moments before she looked up at Chloe and waved the taller girl down to her own height.

"Is it safe to talk about 'you know what'?"

Chloe laughed.

"Yes, Peanut, it is."

Becky looked back up at Dave and then at Mindy.

"You are very beautiful, Mindy, so you must be Hit Girl," Mindy blushed as Becky looked over at Dave. "You are a handsome hunk, so you must be Kick-Ass."

Mindy looked over at Chloe who grinned.

"I like this girl!" Dave commented with his dorky grin.

"What makes you think that?" Mindy asked.

Becky rolled her eyes.

"Chloe said you were intelligent!" Becky huffed before she lectured Mindy. "If Chloe is Shadow, then Joshua has to be Jackal - I could then speculate that you are Hit Girl and that Dave is Kick-Ass."

"Speculate?" Mindy enquired.

"It means to theorise or . . ."

"I know what it means - I just never heard an eight-year-old use the word," Mindy cut in grumpily.

"Read it somewhere - I like to read."

Just then, Stephanie appeared in the living room, fresh from her own shower.

"Who's the half-pint?" she asked.

Becky looked at Stephanie strangely as she caught the accent.

"My name is Becky. Are you saying that I am short? You're not exactly perfect in that department."

Stephanie grinned.

"I'm sorry if I insulted you, Becky."

"No problem - err. . ."

"Stephanie, but you can call me, Steph."

"Stephanie is also one of our senior *Predators*," Mindy explained.

"Oh," Becky replied thoughtfully. "That figures - I've seen a photo of you before."

"Where?" Stephanie asked, intrigued.

"It was in the Senior Instructor's office - it was pinned to the back of his door and it was full of holes plus a couple of throwing knives. I don't think he liked you very much."

Chloe and Mindy burst out laughing while Stephanie just growled dangerously.

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When Abigail came out from her shower, she stood facing Jamie.

Neither spoke for almost a full minute. Neither had had the opportunity to say much more than a brief 'hi' during the rescue. Then they both hugged and ignored the wolf-whistles from all those watching. Abigail tenderly touched the boy's bruised left cheek.

"A present from that bastard, Fraser."

"I'm really pleased that you are alive, Jamie."

"You, too, Abigail."

"You vanished and we feared the worst," Shannon added as she came over.

"Hi, Shannon," Abigail said, giving the older girl a big hug.

"Jamie, Abigail - please meet my father. . ."

"Patrick Millar - it's very good to meet you, Jamie."

Jamie shook the man's hand.

"Shannon said that you were an instructor."

"Yes, Jamie. I oversaw the induction of many kids into *Urban Predator*, including your friend, Saoirse. I cannot undo what I have done - I can only help to make things better."

"You have done, Mr Millar," Jamie replied with a smile.

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"Hi, Rebecca," Shannon said as she sat down beside Becky.

"I prefer, Becky."

"Okay, Becky. I'm really pleased to see you. I never got a chance to really thank you."

"I did what I had to do," Becky replied simply.

"You helped my friend," Jamie added as he joined them. "I saw what they did to you. . ."

"You took part of that beating for me, Jamie - thanks," Becky cut in.

Jamie's face had turned pink and he muttered something unintelligible as his sister came over to see what was going on.

"Stephanie Walker - Psyche - well, well, I never thought that we would ever meet," Shannon said. "I've heard about you - you were infamous; you were always rebelling against 'the system'. I've since heard about what you've been doing and I owe you - every *Predator* owes you. You too, Saoirse - you are just as guilty as her. You both took down an organisation which I never thought could fold. You freed us all - both of you."

Both girls were feeling distinctly uncomfortable as Shannon preached.

"We had a *little* help," Stephanie replied meekly.

There was a growl from Mindy at that comment.

"A *lot* of help, actually," Stephanie corrected quickly.

"I find myself owing my life to Hit Girl," Shannon proclaimed as she turned to Mindy. "For many years, I had planned what I wanted to say to you, if I was ever unfortunate enough to find myself facing you in battle. I blamed you for my life. I blamed you for giving the CIA a template for them to force us all into. But then I mellowed and realised that you didn't choose to become Hit Girl, just as we never chose to become *Predators*. However, you lived up to your awesome reputation and you faced off against the CIA and you won. Ultimately, you supported Stephanie and Saoirse, giving them the resources to complete their mission."

It was Mindy's turn to feel distinctly uncomfortable inside. She hated praise, but she tolerated it nonetheless. However, worse was to come. Shannon stepped forwards and she hugged Mindy, before moving onto Stephanie, and then onto Saoirse. Shannon finally finished her love fest and she giggled.

"Wow - I just hugged Hit Girl without being killed," she said.

"Surprises the fuck outta me, some days. . ." Mindy mused.

"You're just a big softy, Mum," Stephanie laughed as she gave Mindy a hug around the waist.

"Shannon's no longer the little nine-year-old that I once knew," Patrick said wistfully. "It's going to take time to get to know her again."

"I'm still the same little girl, Daddy," Shannon replied.

"Only, she now has boobs - soft ones at that - and she has some lovely thick. . ." Jamie paused as he caught various glares, then he grinned. "I think I'll be talking about something else. . ."

Shannon was blushing furiously but she winked at Jamie nonetheless.

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"So, what's Jamie like?" Saoirse asked Shannon with a smirk.

"An evil little shit who constantly winds me up and doesn't know when to quit!" Shannon exclaimed. "What's Stephanie like?"

"An evil little shit who constantly winds me up and doesn't know when to quit!" Saoirse laughed.

"Hey!" Stephanie and Jamie exclaimed together.

"You can tell they're brother and sister, can't you?" Joshua commented with a grin. "You've got your hands full, Mindy - you too, Dave."

"Oh, yeah!" Dave muttered with a grimace at his wife.



Jamie looked up at his sister who was grimacing and rubbing her right shoulder. Stephanie noticed the glance.

"Don't worry about it, Jamie - I'll tell you about it, later," she suggested.

"Okay. This is the happiest day of my life, Steph. Finding you. . ."

"I know. . ."

Mindy smiled happily as she saw the two siblings hugging and exchanging tears. Stephanie's greatest wish had come true - as had Jamie's. Mindy considered what the twins were going to say; they had no idea that Stephanie had a living brother, nor that he was about to be moving with them. Jamie was older than the twins - only by about six months - so he would be their big brother. Mindy hoped that both Daniel and Anne-Marie would welcome him and that they would get on well, together. It was still very early days and Mindy was aware of how Naomi and Kaitlin had drifted apart since their rescue. Cassie had explained that the two girls were often squabbling over the stupidest little things. Mindy's worry was that Stephanie and Jamie may be too independent to go back to being as close a brother and sister as they apparently had been; it had been so long since they had last been together and they may no longer tolerate each other's idiosyncrasies.

Only time would tell.

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Shannon had never felt so nervous about anything before - not even having sex with Tempest in front of two-hundred kids. Her hand shook as her father handed her the phone. She took it and she held it up to her ear.

"Mommy?"

There was a pause and a stifled sob but then, for the first time in five years, Shannon heard the soft voice of her mother.

"Shannon."

For Shannon, it was too much and she slid down the wall to the floor and she sobbed, hugging the phone as she did so. Her Father sat down beside her and he hugged his daughter tightly for only the second time in five years. It was several minutes before Shannon was able to talk coherently.

"I've missed you, mommy. . ."

"Shannon, it's so good to hear your voice - I have waited for this day for so long. Are you well?"

"I'm fine, mommy - a little bruised and very tired, but I'm okay."

"Your father and I are looking forward to having you home, as are your brother and sister."

"I've really missed them - although I almost forgot about them at one stage and that scared me. Will they remember me?"

"They have never forgotten that they have a big sister and they talk about you a lot."

The conversation was starting to get to Shannon, so she said her goodbyes and handed the phone to her father who chatted for a few minutes with his wife. Shannon made for Saoirse and tapped her fellow *Predator* on the shoulder.

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Saoirse looked up at Shannon and she instantly saw that something was wrong.

"Steph - I'll be a few minutes," Saoirse said and Stephanie nodded as she took in Shannon's expression.

"What's up, Shan?" Saoirse asked as they moved away from everybody.

"Where am I sleeping, tonight?"

"With me and Cassie, I think - although Natasha may be in with us, too. Why?"

"I just wanted to be alone."

Saoirse showed Shannon the camp bed which had been allocated to her. The thirteen-year-old girl slumped down onto the bed and buried her face into the pillow. Saoirse heard the tears and she closed the bedroom door before sitting down on the floor beside Shannon. She rested her hand on the younger girl's back. Saoirse could remember Shannon's first day, like it was yesterday. The girl had been so frightened and Saoirse had done what she could to help the girl. Saoirse had been a *Predator* for eight months which had allowed most of her bitterness to pass. Her hair was still being shaved but she had been able to live with that but the new girl had appeared more devastated than most when she had been showed into the dormitory. Saoirse had found out why, during the evening meal.

Some of the boys had been discussing the new 'naked girl' who had been forced to walk through most of the facility butt naked. That had been a surprise revelation as most public humiliation involving nudity had ceased a couple of months previously when a certain senior female *Predator* had been disciplined quite severely and there had been some repercussions that the instructors had not expected. Saoirse had figured out, almost immediately, that the instructors had had something in for the girl.

No single *Predator* had received such abuse - until one certain little girl who had began her life as a *Predator* in October 2013. Saoirse still felt bad about how much she had made that little girl's life so horrible.

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"Saoirse?"

Shannon looked up and she turned her head to look at who was rubbing her back.

"Yeah - I wanted to stay with you; make sure that you're okay."

"Thank you, Saoirse - you always were a good friend to me. I'm worried, so worried. This is going to be the first night in months where I know that I am going to be safe. I thought that that would make me happy but I keep worrying about what my family is going to think about me. The last time they saw me, I was just a little girl - now I'm a fucking assassin!"

"You don't have to be, Shan. Your family will love you no matter what."

"What if they don't?"

"Shannon!"

Shannon sat up at the sharp rebuke and Saoirse looked up at her.

"I tried to kill Stephanie - three times. You know who my best friend is now?"

Shannon looked blank.

"Stephanie. We are the best of friends because we need one another. What we've done - all that shit is buried. What you've done - nobody will bring that up unless you want to. When you are back in the States, you will always have friends and somebody to talk to. My door is always open to you, Shannon - as will Mindy's."

"Thank you, Saoirse - I'll remember that. This is all so new to me."

"Give it a couple of weeks and you will be enjoying your new life, I promise you."

"I'll sleep better - thanks."

"You want to borrow a T-shirt for bed?"

"Yes, please."

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Mindy faced everybody as they gathered in the lounge.

"I know you're all tired, so I shall keep this short. We've accomplished a lot, tonight. Fraser is missing, but he won't get far - not after what Rigour did to him. Well done, all of you. I am very, very impressed by how you *Predators* fought, tonight. It was the first real opportunity for you all to fight together and a first for the *Vengeance Predators*. You all have Hit Girl's respect and gratitude for your impressive courage and your professional conduct. I speak for Kick-Ass when I say that we would both happily fight alongside any one of you."

The embarrassment on the young faces was palpable as the praise and cheering was dropped upon their very young shoulders.

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***The following morning***  
***Wednesday, September 14<sup>th</sup>***

That morning the group began to go their separate ways.

For the younger girls, there were tears - which had surprised Mindy.

"Just because you've got the emotional range of a teaspoon, doesn't mean we all have, Mindy!" Chloe teased.

"You watch too much Harry Potter," Mindy grouched as she gave Chloe her best scowl.

"Chloe loves Harry Potter," Abby chuckled as she strolled past. "I solemnly swear I am up to no good!"

"She's off to say goodbye to Eric," Chloe commented with a grin.

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Vengeance was packing up for the short road trip to Bournemouth International Airport and from there a flight back to Scotland.

There was a slight difference, in that Abigail would not be returning to Scotland, and neither would Electra - at least not at first. The same with Yvette, who was heading back to Paris. That caused a small scene as the girls sobbed their way through lengthy goodbyes.

Craig was joining his father up at RNAS Yeovilton where he was overseeing repairs to *Twilight* - the helicopter had been collected by a Royal Navy recovery team and carried back to RNAS Yeovilton on the back of a truck. Keira was also joining them before flying back up in a few days.

Mindy and Dave were remaining in the UK for another day or so, along with Stephanie and Jamie. Everybody else was flying back to the USA, later that afternoon once the Gulfstream jet had returned from Scotland.

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There was one other issue: the girl, Amber.

She was an unknown quantity and despite Jamie commenting that she carried a pistol, she did not appear to be a *Predator*; there was no tattoo of a dagger behind her right ear, for a start. Since her return from the attack, Amber had been kept in a back bedroom so she could not see any faces.

Ultimately, she was to be left with Vengeance and she would be *their* problem.

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***Later that afternoon***

***Aboard Alpha Foxtrot***

Once the Gulfstream 650ER executive jet had climbed to its cruising height, everybody settled down for the long flight westward.

Becky looked over at Chloe.

"Are we gonna sleep, all the way home?"

"All the way home."

"Can I dream?"

"Yes, honey, I think we both can - sleep tight."

"Affirmative!"