

Sunday, September 18th, 2016

Glenview

"I'm sorry, Mindy. . ."

"Chloe - shut the fuck up!"

"I'm responsible for her, so. . ."

"Did you bring her school stuff?"

"Yes. Can I see her?"

Mindy and Chloe headed up the stairs. They paused at the door to Anne-Marie's room which was partially open - the room beyond was quiet. Both young women peeked inside and they smiled. Becky and Anne-Marie were fast asleep. Becky's dark brown hair was spread out on the pillow beside the lighter brown hair of her friend.

"Little terrors!" Chloe chuckled as she turned away from the little girl who had recently become the centre of her and Joshua's lives.

"Go get fucked!"

Chloe scowled and Mindy laughed.

"I mean it - go get fucked by your man. . ."

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Lucy hated Sundays.

Something to do with Monday following on close behind. The girl sat astride her black Yamaha FZ-09 motorcycle, just off Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway, about six miles south-south-west of Colorado Springs. Below her, in the valley, just to the south of Fort Carson, were the ruins of a large complex of concrete buildings. All were destroyed, mostly by fire and, her skilled eyes told her, explosives.

To Lucy, the place had been hell on earth, but for almost five years, it had also been the closest thing she had had to a home. It was also where they had first met, seven long years before. A single tear ran down her left cheek at the thought of what she had lost.

"Fucking pussy!" she growled, ashamed at herself for showing her feelings.

With a kick of her left boot, she kicked the motorcycle into first gear and accelerated down the road, leaving her past behind her.

The following day

Monday, September 19th

Chicago, Illinois

Glenview

"Mindy?"

"Yes, Becky."

"I'm really sorry for my behaviour, yesterday."

"I know you are - you're just being a kid and no harm was done. Apology accepted."

"Thank you."

"Go get your breakfast, sweetie - you look very smart."

Becky blushed and giggled as she joined Anne-Marie in the kitchen for a bowl of chocolate cereal before school. They were joined by the two boys, as well as by Stephanie, soon after.

Mindy finished off her own breakfast as Dave breezed in, gave his wife a kiss, said goodbye to the kids, and headed out the door.

That evening

Training Centre Echo

Level 0

"You sure about this, honey?"

"Yes, Dave - it'll be fine . . . I think."

"Okay - you going to talk with them first?"

"Yes, I will."

Mindy headed for the changing rooms where she found Stephanie, Megan, and Abigail.

"You guys, okay?"

"Hi, Mindy," Abigail replied with a smile. "Thanks for this."

"Okay - while Megan finishes dressing you, let's go over a few things. Stephanie, Abigail - I know that there is no love lost between you two. This sparring session is intended to allow Abigail to get used to fighting in her new combat suit. I am also allowing you two to vent a little against one another - but you both need to remember that killing each other is in the past. Please do not abuse my trust - I think you both know what might happen should you abuse my trust."

"We do," the two girls replied.

"I'm expecting to see some good moves out there - use your skills and demonstrate what you are both capable of. While I am familiar with what Stephanie can do and I have seen some of what you can do, Abigail, I need to be certain that you can keep up with the rest of us."

"I can!" Abigail growled.

"Yes - but I want to see it."

"Okay."

"Megan - send them both out when Abigail's ready, okay?"

"Will do!" Megan replied.

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Okay, Mindy was being devious - not really a big surprise - she was setting up Psyche and Fury; just for a bit of fun, of course - just some harmless fun.

There was cheering from the assembled vigilantes as the two masked vigilantes made their way down the steps and onto the mat. Psyche was dressed in her combat suit and ready for action. Her adversary was Fury, who was appearing for the very first time in her new combat suit. The ten-year-old's slim frame was covered from head to toe in body armour which was predominantly scarlet in colour but with her chest armour and thighs in graphite grey. Her face was completely covered and the young vigilante showed no skin. Her eyes glowed a luminous yellow to accentuate the furious look of the mask. Her utility belt held a single Heckler & Koch P30SK pistol on her right hip with four spare magazines, plus communications equipment and a combat knife. She wore gauntlets with graphite grey armour on the back of her hands. Her boots were also graphite grey and they rose up her lower leg to just below the knee. Fury's primary weapon was a custom double-ended carbon-fibre bō-staff which she held in her left hand.

As Psyche looked around, she smelt a rat - she had expected to see her brother on the sidelines watching the fight; he was not there. The veteran *Predator*, and more recently, veteran vigilante, had no more time to dwell on her thoughts as Fury attacked. Psyche struggled to clear her mind which was dredging up memories which she never wanted to see again. She saw the naked Electra with vicious, bloody scars across her body. She saw Electra stabbed and tied to a tree. Then she saw the cause of those horrific injuries - she saw Fury, in that woodland.

Psyche saw red as she drew a Sai in each hand and she parried away the razor-sharp bō-staff blade.

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Fury noticed the change in Psyche's demeanour and to be brutally honest, she was visualising exactly what she figured Psyche was. It had been years ago, but it all still felt very raw as the physical scars still existed, as did the mental scars. Fury had mental scars that revolved around Psyche setting her up to be raped and that experience was now associated with something that she could not remember but which had left mental scars which caused horrific

nightmares as her mind visualised what some man had done to her body while she had been under the influence of some godawful drugs.

Fury hated Psyche like nothing else only, part of her liked the girl inside, Stephanie. The young girl was nothing like she had been when Fury had last known her and that gave Fury pause to reconsider her own feelings towards Stephanie and her alter-ego, Psyche.

Nonetheless, Fury needed to fight her nemesis before she could put away her memories for good. Fury was skilled with the bō-staff and she wielded it against her adversary. Twice, she struck Psyche with the flat of a blade, causing a shout of pain and indignation

Fury was rewarded for her strikes by a Sai striking her new body armour - they hurt! Psyche had her own supporters but Fury had expected to have had her own but there was no sign of Jamie, nor was there any sign of Shannon. Fury had no time to dwell on unimportant thoughts as she found herself kicked hard and then her bō-staff was knocked out of her hand by a double roundhouse kick the second one of which sent the girl spinning onto the mat. Psyche ran at Fury, kicking her in the side just as the other girl rolled away, seizing Psyche's right ankle and yanking it.

Psyche struck the mat, hard, but she instantly regained her feet as Fury attacked again and they both went down together, viciously punching each other wherever they could reach. Their respective armour provided protection but only to a point. Both girls yelled out as the other punched them in the head, in the side, in the chest, in the stomach. It was a full-on brawl and the bruises were stacking up.

Then Hit Girl threw in her wildcard - actually two wildcards. The two young girls broke apart as Hit Girl yelled out a warning.

"Team up, Psyche and Fury - you are under attack! Comms are activated and isolated."

Psyche and Fury were forced to change from fighting one another to fighting as a team as two unknown armour-clad individuals appeared on the mat, advancing towards Psyche and Fury. One was tall and one was short - both girls had an inkling who they might be.

"I've got your back, Psyche," Fury called over the comms circuit.

Both girls swept up their discarded weapons and they turned to face the approaching threat.

"Copy that, Fury."

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The taller vigilante was a girl - tall and well-formed; it had to be Stormtide.

Her combat suit was predominantly azure blue with basalt grey tiger stripes covering the armour. Her eyes glowed a luminous green which complimented her stormy colour-scheme. As with Fury, no skin was

visible. Twin H&K P30 pistols adorned her hips along with the usual array of magazine pouches and communications equipment. Her right thigh bore a mount for four titanium throwing knives while an eight-inch combat knife was strapped to her left calf. In her left hand, she held a double-ended carbon-fibre bō-staff which was very similar to that held by Fury but a few inches longer in length to match the girl's extra height.

The bō-staff cut through the air and Fury had barely a second to react as the bigger girl attacked and reattacked. Fury was already tired after fighting Psyche but the new girl appeared very fresh and full of energy. But Fury had trained for such a situation and she did not back down easily but instead, she flew at Stormtide while Psyche faced off against the other new armoured vigilante who appeared more than a little familiar to the seasoned fighter.

The boy was covered from head to toe in a deep orange combat suit with certain sections of armour in flame red, trimmed with signal yellow. The eyes in his mask glowed a luminous red. Around the boy's waist was a utility belt carrying communications equipment, spare magazines, and a custom Heckler & Koch P30SK pistol. On his right calf, he carried a six-inch combat knife.

"You think you can take me, Rage?" Psyche growled as she spun the Sai in each hand.

"I can take you, anytime I choose, slapper!" Rage growled as he wielded his twenty-eight-inch Messer Sword.

"Big words from a little shit!" Psyche responded with a grin as she considered that it was barely a week since they had last fought one another.

"Less chatter, bitch - let's see some fightin'!" Rage responded.

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Mindy smirked as she watched the four youngsters spar on the mat. The sparring attracted quite a few onlookers who stayed off the capacious mat due to the very sharp blades which were being employed. Despite her attempt at causing trouble, Fury and Psyche were holding their own against the opposing team. Stormtide had numerous advantages over Fury but the younger girl was doing well as the bō-staffs clashed. Lucius Fox had done well to provide the combat suits so fast but they would be needed, very soon, to protect every member of *Fusion* over the coming weeks. While Stormtide fought the ferocious and aptly names, Fury, Mindy turned her attentions to the two siblings who fought a few yards away.

Mindy was still coming to terms with having a new child in the family. Stephanie had taken some getting used to but Jamie was something else and he was still very unsure of himself and his new surroundings. The boy was capable - that was obvious by how long he had survived alone and then with Shannon. Dave and Mindy were still piecing together the events surrounding Jamie, Shannon, and Abigail.

Rage was using his blade to good effect as he swung it towards his sister. Psyche was highly skilled and more experienced than her younger brother but Jamie had raw skills which Psyche was still quantifying. He managed to land a strike on Psyche which elicited a cry of rage and then Rage found himself in retreat as he was chased by a Sai-wielding maniac.

Rage was not looking where he was going and he cannoned into Stormtide, taking the older girl down with him as he fell. Fury took advantage of the unexpected turn of events and she kicked Stormtide in the left thigh, following up with a punch to the chest which elicited a scream from the infuriated teenager.

"You fucking little bitch!" Stormtide growled.

"Maybe Tempest will rub your boobs better," Fury teased.

"When you get some, I'll return the fucking favour!" Stormtide barked back.

"Will you two just get a bloody room!" Psyche growled as she flipped Stormtide over and down onto her back for the second time in as many minutes. "Stay the fuck down, Stormy!"

"You too, fuckwit!" Fury growled down at Rage who was trying in vain to regain his feet but with Fury's right foot on his throat.

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"Well done!"

The four youngsters turned to face Hit Girl as she stepped onto the mat.

"That was a remarkable display and well executed. Rage, honey, you need to sort out your situational awareness - you took out your partner and laid yourselves open to attack. Fury, Psyche - very good, today. I commend you both for your abilities and for being quick to reassess the situation when I tried to fuck things up for you both."

"I know how you work," Psyche chuckled. "I expected something."

"I am pleased to see you both working together as a team," Hit Girl finished as she helped Stormtide back to her feet and the annoyed vigilante pulled off her mask, glaring at Jamie as he reappeared from under his own mask.

"Don't get stormy with me, Stormy," Jamie quipped - then he yelled out as Shannon kicked him in the side.

Jamie landed in a heap and he glowered as laughter rang out from the surrounding walkway.

"Where's Abigail?" Stephanie asked as she pulled off her mask and looked around the mat.

"I think I saw her heading towards the changing rooms," Tommy Morgan offered. "That was good fighting. You looked good."

Stephanie grinned as she headed towards the changing rooms beyond the enormous concrete edifice that occupied the area beside the mat.

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There was no sign of Abigail as Stephanie headed into the changing rooms. The male section was empty as was the female area. However, Abigail's body armour was strewn on a bench. Stephanie removed her own body armour, collating it neatly on another section of bench ready to be returned to the armoury after her shower. After pulling off her sweaty T-shirt and boy shorts, Stephanie grabbed a towel and she headed for the female showers from where she could hear water running. As Stephanie entered the showers, she could hear something amidst the steam . . . crying.

"May I join you, Abigail?"

"Go away!"

"It's Steph - please?"

Abigail said nothing, so Stephanie took that as a 'yes' and she hung up her towel before heading into the shower area. Stephanie found Abigail huddled under one of the showers, hot water pelting her body. The girl looked miserable and very soggy. Stephanie turned on the next shower and she sat down under the water, enjoying the pounding hot water on her sore body.

"Talk to me, Abigail."

"I don't know what to do. We're not supposed to be enemies but I'm still struggling with our past and I want to push past it but I can't. I feel so alone. I feel like you are the only one that I can talk to - only you are my Nemesis, not my friend."

Stephanie felt really sorry for the girl but despite her own feelings towards Abigail, she had a responsibility towards the girl and they both needed to work at moving on from their shared past.

"You are *not* alone!"

"I've been alone for months - I've had nobody."

"You had Jamie and Shannon," Stephanie pointed out.

"Yes - that was good, for as long as it lasted."

"I know - you got take and . . ."

"You can say it - I was raped."

"Yes."

"My life is one ginormous fucking train wreck," Abigail growled as she looked over at Stephanie. "I even tried to bloody well kill myself!"

"Considering how much effort you put into everything, Abigail, if you really wanted to kill yourself, then you'd be pushing up the fucking daisies!" Stephanie pointed out and Abigail actually giggled.

"I had no other option open to me."

"Yes, you did!" Stephanie said angrily. "You think I never thought about killing myself and ending the suffering? Those bastards had a fucking hardon for me and they made my life worthless. You are just as strong as me, Abigail, you are a survivor. You are a survivor, just like me, just like Jamie, just like Shannon and all the others: Naomi, Kaitlin, Harper, Yvette, Craig, Saoirse, Aiden, Christina, Sky, Sarah, Marc, Electra, Hunter, Leo, Rebecca - they are all survivors who want to live."

"Mindy put me and Saoirse in charge of the welfare of all you Predators. Mindy figured out early on that what we all need is somebody who understands what we've all been through. I had Saoirse to help me through the worst shit - and she had me. We hated each other much worse than you and I do. Right now, I can't imagine life without that girl to talk to and laugh with. What you need, Abigail, is a friend."

Abigail stared at the tile floor for a minute before she looked over at Stephanie again, a smile showing amidst a look of desperation.

"Will you be my friend? Will you be there for me?"

"Till the end of time, Abigail," Stephanie replied as she stood up. "I owe you, Abigail - without you, I might never have found my little brother . . . alive. Now, stand up and get yourself cleaned up."

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Abigail smiled as she began to wash, feeling happier than she had in many months. Stephanie was her nemesis, just as Saoirse had been Stephanie's. Abigail hated to admit it, but Stephanie was right. The girl whom she had hated for over two years was to be the one to help her get her life back together. Abigail laughed as she washed her hair.

"Something funny?" Stephanie asked.

"I'm being lectured by a girl, six months my junior! You know, it sucks - I'm six months older than you, but you have boobs and you're growing hair down below; I have absolutely nothing - not even bumps!"

"Sorry - I have no control over my body's physical development, but I'm sure you'll get the right bits in due course. Jamie will just have to wait."

Abigail blushed furiously at the last comment but then she smirked at Stephanie.

"Shouldn't you be wearing a bra?"

Stephanie rolled her eyes.

"Nope!" she growled.

"You look like you need one."

Stephanie shook her head and she chuckled.

"Did Mindy put you up to this?"

"Nope."

"For the love of God!" Stephanie breathed. "Okay, they aren't all that big and a bra will just swamp them for Heaven's sake!"

"Still think you need one."

"Can we talk about something else, please, Abigail?"

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As the two girls finished showering and moved to leave the shower area, they heard voices from the changing rooms. The voices were getting louder as one voice got more and more agitated.

"I just wish that two of the most important people in my life weren't always at each other's throats!"

It was Jamie's voice followed by Shannon's.

"Give them time, Jamie - they'll come around."

"I wish they'd just kiss and makeup."

Stephanie and Abigail looked at each other.

"You want to fuck with Jamie?" Abigail said after a pause, her cheeks turning pink.

"Why the hell not?" Stephanie replied, rhetorically.

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Jamie was surprised - very surprised.

His sister had just appeared from the showers . . . with Abigail. He began to smell a rat when he saw them both holding hands like they were friends. Shannon was a little confused too, knowing that the two girls were long-time foes.

"Hi, Jamie," Abigail said sweetly.

"We got a surprise for you," Stephanie added.

Then, to Jamie's surprise, both girls dropped their towels and they turned to each other and kissed one another, full on the lips, their naked bodies pressed together. Shannon produced a very loud wolf-whistle as she watched the two girls kissing. After about ten seconds, Stephanie and Abigail separated.

"Well, Jamie," Abigail commented. "We made up, earlier - now we've kissed. . ."

"You happy, Jamie?" Stephanie grinned.

The boy was totally speechless and his mouth hung open, his eyes popping out of his head as he tried to register the sight of his sister and best-friend kissing while stark naked. Chloe was standing beyond Shannon and her mouth hung open, too. Shannon wolf-whistled again as the two embarrassed girls grabbed up their towels and scampered off to find some clothing. They were followed by cat-calls and wolf-whistles as the boys present quickly got in on the act. The red-faced Stephanie hugged her towel to her body as she scampered past a wide-eyed Tommy who smiled approvingly as he watched her vanish behind some lockers.

"Wow. . .!" Tommy exclaimed.

Later that night

Glenview

"Can I trust you two to behave while sharing the same bed? You know, after that erotic display, earlier?"

Both girls blushed bright red as Mindy grinned. Stephanie growled and glared at her Mum who just chuckled and smiled proudly at her daughter.

"Good night, girls."

Once Mindy had gone, and the door was firmly closed, Abigail looked over at her new friend.

"Your Mum is really proud of you, Steph . . . will I ever have a family? I want somebody to be proud of *me*."

Stephanie grinned fiendishly.

"I may have some thoughts on that, Abigail. Now you be a good girl and go to sleep."

Abigail grinned, just as fiendishly.

"Fuck you!"

The following morning ***Tuesday, September 20th***

Glenview

"Steph?"

"In here, Jamie."

The boy followed the sound of his sister's voice but then he stopped dead as he found his sister in the bathroom - she was completely naked and she stood facing him. Jamie winced as he noticed the ragged scar on her chest, among other things, and his mouth dropped open in surprise.

"Steph - you're naked. . ."

"I've just stepped out of the shower - I usually shower naked."

Jamie felt his face getting really hot then Steph smiled and she laughed.

"You've seen me naked before - admittedly, it was quite a while ago but nothing much has changed, believe me."

"You have hair down there. . ." Jamie commented shyly.

"Not all that much, but yes, I have pubic hair - so what?"

"I'm sorry. . ." he spluttered as he ran out of the bathroom.

Stephanie rolled her eyes and she grabbed up a fluffy pink towel, wrapping it around her body.

"Jamie!" she yelled as she came out of the bathroom into her bedroom.

Stephanie found her brother sitting on her bed and he was looking down at the floor.

"I'm sorry if I embarrassed you, Jamie. I tend not to think about nudity much; I was naked a lot as a Predator. Mind you, from what I understand, you're not exactly a novice when it comes to seeing females naked."

"Shannon and Abigail weren't my sister. Is it true that you killed a girl while you were both naked?"

Stephanie grinned.

"Yes, Jamie - that's how I got my codename so early."

"Can you tell me the story some time?"

"Definitely - the others have heard it and SD has filled in some of the gaps for me."

"Will you tell me about that scar, too?"

"Of course - you're my brother - but I might need help as I don't really remember all that much about it. What were you wanting?"

"I wanted to thank you for what you're doing for Abigail. I know it must have been really hard for you both to see eye to eye."

"You care about her, don't you?"

"I do."

"It was time for us both to put the past in the past. We both care about you, Jamie, and neither of us wants to hurt you."

"I love you, Steph . . . I'm glad we're back together again."

"I love you, too, Jamie."

That evening

South Whipple

Abigail was silently crapping herself.

The ten-year-old had done many things in her life which had scared her half to death. The girl had taken lives. The girl had mutilated other kids, leaving them scarred for life. However, the prospect of meeting her new family was so nerve-wracking that she almost felt like weeing herself as she struggled to cope with her insides which were turning around like a washing machine on high-speed spin.

Mindy grinned at Abigail's expression as she and Stephanie escorted the young girl up the path to her new home. Waiting on the doorstep were three people: Paul Murphy, his wife, Rachel, and his son, Bradley. They smiled at their visitors and headed inside the house

"Murphy family," Stephanie announced. "Please meet Abigail Wilde. Abigail, this is Paul, Rachel, and Brad - Brad is thirteen and he likes to read porn mags."

"Stephanie!" Mindy growled as Abigail giggled and Brad blushed wildly while his father raised an eyebrow.

"Just trying to put her mind at ease, is all!" Stephanie hissed.

"Welcome to our home, Abigail," Rachel Murphy said. "I am Rachel and we want you to see this house as your home, too."

"Welcome, Abigail," Paul added.

"Hi, Abigail - you're now my kid sister," Brad said proudly and Abigail grinned.

"Watch out, Bradley," Stephanie cautioned. "She bites!"

"I told Jamie not to tell anybody about that," Abigail groaned.

"You bit Jamie?" Stephanie asked.

"Never mind," Abigail muttered.

"I think we'll be just fine," Brad commented as he smiled down at his new sister. "You wanna come see your room?"

Abigail's uneasiness returned with a vengeance.

"Can Steph come?"

"The more the merrier!"

