

**Wednesday, April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**00:30**

**Urban Predator Training Facility, Milan**

It was a medium-sized facility, based on a large warehouse.

Entry had been a just a little too easy for a suspected CIA facility. She found out why, very quickly as she burst in, weapons raised. It was no longer a training facility. . .

It was no longer a training facility - it was a fucking tomb.

"How could they. . .?" she exclaimed.

She had never seen so much carnage; at least not of the kind that lay before her. She counted each body, from the smaller ones, up to the bigger ones . . . twenty-six in total. She was not the only one counting, either.

"They killed twenty-six kids. . ." Shadow said incredulously. "Some of them are younger than Stephanie, for fuck's sake!"

They had all been shot and Hit Girl's trained eye saw that many of the wounds had been inflicted as the kids had tried to run away from the danger. She knelt down and she closed the staring blue eyes of a young girl about the same age as Anne-Marie, her beauty marred by the single .40-calibre hole in her forehead.

But then everything changed and the girl changed *into* Anne-Marie. Hit Girl looked up aghast at Shadow - only, Shadow had a bullet in the centre of her own forehead, blood dribbled down her face and then she dropped to the floor, dead. Shadow's body fell beside another body - this one taller and more muscular.

"Joshua!" Mindy exclaimed as she stared down at the boy who had always brought fun and joy to her life; he had three bullet holes in his chest.

Mindy looked around her as faces suddenly became sharp and she saw all of her friends and companions. They were all dead - Megan, Curtis, Erika . . . it went on. Mindy was angry - who could have done such a thing. She had not felt so much anger since...

She had never felt so much anger...

The anger, however, had heightened the veteran vigilante's senses and she heard something above her; she recognised the sound of an AR-15 being brought to readiness.

It was an obvious ambush and she reacted, turning her pistol towards the sound and rippling off bullets. Her mind registered the rapid action of the AR-15 cycling and spraying death in her direction. She felt the first bullet as it tore into her side and then she fell to the floor as another bullet tore through her left thigh before finally, a bullet tore her heart in two.

Darkness fell. . .

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**Sunday, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Glenview**

Mindy snapped awake in an instant.

But before she could begin to panic, she was suddenly reassured by the strong arms which wrapped themselves around her body.

"Another nightmare?"

"Third one since we went to bed."

"Same every year," Dave commented to nobody in particular.

"I *hate* this time of year."

Dave hugged his wife's naked body which was bathed in a sheen of sweat. It was another one of the annual events which plagued their lives. So many of which were bad, just like the one for that Sunday.

"Seven years . . . but it feels like it was only yesterday. Getting shot by dickwad, waking up all alone. I was so scared but the one thing that kept me going was the thought of finding not just my Daddy but also finding you - and putting a bullet into your stupid skull."

"I did kinda betray you. . ."

"Don't start - it was dickwad; he tricked you. I can still see my Daddy, burning. I can still remember his last words to me. I can still remember that night when I geared up. I can remember your expression when I showed you the jetpack. I can remember how happy I was when you flew into sight and you blasted the fuck out of that bastard with his bazooka."

"Why *did* Damon have a bazooka, anyway?"

Mindy laughed.

"I have no idea - he just acquired shit and hung it on the walls."

"I'm sorry you lost your Daddy."

"In some ways, I'm not. He did his best but he turned me into somebody who I struggle to control. If he had never died then I might never have revealed myself to you. You, Dave Lizewski, are the best thing that has ever happened to me. How the fuck, you put up with me, I have no idea. But, seven years later, and we're still talking to each other."

Mindy paused to turn her head and kiss her husband.

"It's been a wild ride, honey."

"That it has," Mindy mused as she cuddled into her husband, absorbing his warmth and strength.

Without Dave, she would be nothing, she would be dead. Dave kept her alive. Dave kept her human. Dave helped her cope with her ever changing life. Hit Girl really did owe her very life and existence to the dick in a green and yellow wetsuit who almost pissed himself at Rasul's.

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"What's up with Mum?" Stephanie asked, over breakfast.

Dave waved Stephanie to sit down beside him.

"Seven years ago, Mindy's father died - you've seen the video. A lot happened that night. Mindy almost died and so did I. Mindy struggles with the memories every year."

"I understand."

"I know that last weekend was the third anniversary of you and Jamie being taken. I know you tried to hide it but while he did not know the date, I know that you did and I heard you crying into the night. I did not want to intrude."

Stephanie hugged Dave tightly.

"Thanks. I want to forget it, but I can't. The terror. The fear. The hopelessness. Jamie was only five and I don't think he remembers much of what happened."

"We all have bad memories, Steph. But it helps to talk or at least have somebody there to help you and just be with you. Mindy doesn't really talk about it - she just wants me to be there for her and to hug her."

"I'll remember that, next month - I'm scared of how I'll be. October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013 - we were separated for the final time and I would not see him again for almost three years."

"Stephanie - we've warned you about reading your *Predator* file. There's nothing good in there, pal."

"I just needed to know what happened. I've forgotten so much. . ."

"Believe me, Steph, there are some things which should remain hidden," Dave said darkly.

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### **Winnetka Road**

Summer Frasier cringed as she peeled back the dressing from her right upper arm and shoulder.

The bullet had struck the breech of her rifle, shattering it, before the remains of the bullet had torn through her armour and gouged a furrow through her bicep and then through her right shoulder before

stopping against the inside of her suit. Her arm was black and blue with bruising not to mention the blood. There was no permanent damage on the inside - she could move the arm, but she would have a vicious scar on her upper right arm.

That bastard sniper!

They were supposed to have died.

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### ***Glenview***

The day was not going as badly as it could have, in hindsight.

After their return from Chloe's the previous evening, they had barely managed to get into bed before Mindy's cell had vibrated and Mindy was suddenly on edge as she saw who was calling.

"Chloe?"

*"Mindy . . . sorry for calling so late. . ."*

Mindy was worried.

"What's wrong?"

"What was it like - you know, the first time that Anne-Marie called you 'Mom'?"

Oh!

"It felt weird - but a good weird. I never knew that a single word could possibly mean so much to someone. I hate to admit it, but I cried."

*"It started with Josh - Becky called him 'Dad' while I was out getting stuff from the apartment. Then when I got back, she called me 'Mum' and she asked if that was okay. I couldn't reply - but yeah, I cried."*

"Feels good, doesn't it?" Mindy said. "It takes some getting used to but I love begin call Mom - or Mum as Steph puts it."

*"Yeah - Becky uses 'Mum' just like Steph does."*

"Can I go back to my husband now, Chloe? I want him to bone me," Mindy asked.

"Ewww!"

"I'm sure Joshua would be happy to bone you - did you get my little present?"

Chloe laughed.

*"I did - thanks. One's been used already. . ."*

"More information than I needed," Mindy growled before firing off a counter blow. "Guess what Mommy and Daddy are doing right now."

"Double ewww!" Chloe groaned at the thought of her parents having sex.

"Night, Chloe."

"Night, best friend, ever."

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Mindy and Dave had found their kids awaiting their arrival home and all were unhurt and the house was suspiciously intact.

Hailee had volunteered (somewhat reluctantly) to look after the kids - although Stephanie 'I don't need looking after' Lizewski had complained bitterly about having a sitter. Normally, it would have been Paige but she was busy looking after little Marty on behalf of Marty and Kim. It was Marty's birthday on that Saturday, and they had wanted to go out for the day so Paige had stepped in and taken Marty for the day which Megan had thought was great.

Marty, it transpired, had had a good day, apparently!

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### ***Fielding Drive***

Becky was happily forcing pancakes into her mouth, ignoring the maple syrup which dribbled down her chin and then down onto her t-shirt.

The eight-year-old had awoken that morning, full of energy and promptly woken her 'parents' up who were a little tired having been 'up and down' for most of the night. Chloe had finally given in with a barely concealed scream and rolled out of bed. Becky, in turn, pushed her in the direction of the bathroom and told her to 'get a move on, you stink'. Chloe had reappeared ten minutes later to find an annoyed Becky bouncing on the end of the bed with a tired Joshua groaning as he tried to ignore the little girl's bouncing.

Chloe finished drying off after her shower before she pulled on some clean clothes and then Becky dragged her off towards the stairs and then the kitchen.

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Joshua appeared, just as the first round of pancakes were cooking and he slumped into a chair beside his wide-awake daughter.

"Morning, Daddy!"

"Morning, again, bouncy daughter."

Becky giggled as Joshua reached out for the mug of tea which Chloe pushed in his direction.

"Mum's making pancakes - you having some?"

"I could do with the food, yes."

"Were you two having sex *all* night?"

"New rule, Rebecca," Chloe stated. "No talking about sex."

"Understood!" Becky replied with a mock salute.

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By the time, Chloe and Joshua were working their way through their own pancakes, Becky had finished and she was talking non-stop like usual.

"Chloe?"

"Yeah, Peanut?"

"What's 'morning wood'?" Becky asked.

Chloe's face went bright pink and she turned to a smirking Joshua who had struggled not to choke on a forkful of pancake.

"Would you like to take that question, Joshua?"

"Not really, my lovely Chloe," Joshua laughed.

"Where *did* you hear that . . . err, term?" Chloe asked the ever-curious little eight-year-old.

"I heard some boys talking about it at school."

"Well, I would suggest that you go look it up on the laptop - try Google," Chloe suggested - far too embarrassed to explain the term to a young girl of such a tender, innocent, age.

Becky scrambled off her chair and bolted for the laptop which sat on the kitchen side. A few minutes later, she found her answer.

"Found it - it says. . ."

"Becky!" Chloe called out, desperately as Joshua burst out laughing. "We *don't* need to hear it!"

"'kay!" Becky shouted back.

Chloe dropped her head onto the table and moaned.

"Was I this bad as an eight-year-old?" she bleated.

"I'll ask your Mom next time I see her," Joshua replied.

"Talk about embarrassing!"

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### **Morton Grove**

Joshua was at the apartment with the terror, packing, while Chloe had stopped off to see her mother.

"Mom - did I ever ask embarrassing questions when I was little?"

Cathy laughed.

"Oh, yeah!" she replied. "What has the delightful Becky asked?"

"I'd rather not say. . ."

"About girls?"

"No."

"Boys?" Cathy guessed.

Chloe slumped down onto the couch and nodded. Cathy sat down in a chair facing her daughter.

"Some years back - you would have been about six or probably closer to seven. Curtis was about three and . . ."

"Did little me hear my name?" Curtis said as he came into the living room and jumped onto the couch, snuggling up to his cousin.

"We're about to hear another embarrassing story about your cousin," Cathy explained to her nephew.

Curtis grinned as he looked up at Chloe who scowled.

"You comfy?" Chloe enquired and Curtis nodded - he would never miss a chance to witness his cousin's humiliation.

"As I was saying - a seven-year-old Chloe and a three-year-old Curtis were in the bath together. Chloe was at a stage in her life where she was questioning everything. Well, she was ever the curious little girl and she had noticed that Curtis was differently equipped to her."

Chloe rolled her eyes as Curtis sniggered.

"Chloe pointed at her cousin and she asked, 'Why does Curtis have that thingy between his legs?' Well, I told her what boys have a penis. Chloe wanted to know *why* her cousin had a penis and what it was for. I decided that Chloe was too young for the birds and the bees, so I told her to wait a few more years."

Curtis laughed out loud as Chloe blushed furiously.

"Well," she said. "Curtis appears to have figured out what his penis is for - or at least Megan has!"

"We don't do *that* stuff, yet," Curtis muttered as his face exploded.

"That's okay, sweetie," Chloe teased as she hugged her cousin.

"Don't worry, Chloe - you have many more embarrassing years ahead of you," Cathy chuckled.

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***That evening***

***Sheridan Road***

Shannon wormed into her father as they sat and watched tv.

"Hi, sweetheart," Patrick Millar said.

"I still haven't forgiven you, Dad."

"I'm just happy I have you back, Shannon."

Shannon was happy to be back - very happy. Twelve-year-old Annabelle and her ten-year-old brother, Iain, were also very happy to have their big sister back. They had both talked about Shannon's anger at finding out that her siblings were trained vigilantes. They also understood her anger. They hated seeing Shannon's anger at her parents and they did everything that they could to give Shannon access to their Mom and Dad. Shannon had missed out on so many years and she needed the quality time with her parents.

Thirteen-year-old Marc felt like a fifth wheel in the house. He had moved in the previous week to be with Shannon. Shannon's mother, Taylor, had decided it would be easier if he lived there as he was spending a lot of money on cabs! Nevertheless, the boy had his own bedroom on the second floor, below his thirteen-year-old girlfriend's bedroom on the third floor. That had been a diplomatic way to allow Marc to live with them, without it looking obviously sexual. There were also rules. There was to be no naked bodies outside of their bedrooms. No loud sexual activities keeping the household awake. No overtly sexual activity outside the house in public. No sexual activity until homework was completed. Any trouble at school, or any rules broken and they would be restricted to their own bedrooms.

While Shannon had believed herself to be beyond rules, her parents had put the proverbial foot down and warned her in no uncertain terms that Marc could always go back to live at the Safehouse. Shannon had given in - under protest - while secretly glad to be treated like a kid again. She enjoyed the discipline from her parents - she knew that they both loved her dearly.

She also did not want to lose Marc.

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***The following morning  
Monday, September 26<sup>th</sup>***

***Lake View High School***

The city was in meltdown.

Despite that, it was to be her first day as a Senior at Lake View High School. Her trip on the bus that morning had been fraught with problems. Two windows of the bus had been smashed as they had been driving down the street but the driver had kept her foot down until she was safely in the clear before slowing down. She also witnessed a mugging and a police shootout along the way which had surprised her greatly. She knew that Chicago had the reputation for being a rough city but it was also a protected city - or so she thought.



After checking in with the school office, Lucy made her way to her first lessons. Despite expecting to see the girl, Lucy was more than a little surprised to recognise one of the Sophomores: Saoirse Doherty - it had been a couple of years since she had last laid eyes on the bitch (well, face to face, at least); the girl had been about thirteen back then. Lucy was surprised when out of the blue, another Sophomore had caught her eye: Sarah Hampton. Neither of the girls noticed Lucy, they seemed intent on their own discussions as they chatted with some other kids.

Lucy decided that she would have to be careful - both girls knew her . . . and they hated her - enough to kill her?

She wasn't sure.

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Back to the city in meltdown.

Lucy was very attentive to everything that went on around her - a part of her intensive training since she was ten - and she had noticed much since her arrival. The weekend had been spent scouting the city. Russians? Sicilians? And what the fuck were those masked idiots? Her mind remembered something about a fight at some silos: A Corsair. What the bloody hell was going on in Chicago? It was like a goddamn war zone!

Lucy had recognised another face at lunchtime: Marc Ryan, and he was snuggling up to . . . oh, that was unexpected - Shannon? What was going on, it was like the school was *Predator Central*!

The faces brought back memories as she dug into her sandwich and kept her head down.

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**Thursday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011**

***The Urban Predator Academy  
Colorado Springs, Colorado***

It was the second batch.

Lucy was now able to get an inkling of who might and who might not last as a *Predator*. As the eighteen kids - nine boys and nine girls, just as before - stripped off their clothing, Lucy looked from face to face. They were all very miserable; who would not be in the same situation? The group was different to the first; three of the girls and four of the boys looked to be a lot younger than the others. One of those, a thin, pale girl with medium-length dark-brown hair, was sobbing as she reluctantly slid her knickers down and off before she dropped them on the pile of her freshly discarded clothing. The girl gazed over at Lucy who showed no emotion as the younger girl stood there, completely naked and attempting to cover herself up as a couple of the boys glanced over at her body, despite them being just as naked as she was.

"Stop snivelling, brat," Lucy growled as she walked over to the girl only to cause more sobbing. "What's your name?"

"Saoirse."

"Irish?"

"I'm from Belfast."

"An Irish slut - you'll fit in well!" Lucy laughed as she back-handed the nine-year-old girl across her right buttock eliciting a yelp of pain.

The other two, very naked, younger girls cowered together.

"Names?"

"Ra . . . Rachel."

"Kara."

"Leave them alone!" came a voice.

"What?" Lucy demanded of another naked girl, taller than all the others.

"Leave them alone!" the girl repeated.

"You are. . .?"

"Sarah. . ."

Before Sarah could say any more, Lucy punched her in the face. That was followed up by a swift kick between the legs which put Sarah on the ground in agony.

"Fair warning . . . insolence will *not* be tolerated."

Lucy was not to know how much that comment was to come back and haunt her, just a few months into her future.

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**Monday, September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Lake View High School  
Chicago, Illinois**

Juno Grant was still as much of a bitch as she always was.

While her credibility amongst the student body had crumbled - ever since her run in with Lauren Edwards, six months previously - she was still making waves by opening her mouth when she should have been keeping it firmly shut. The girl enjoyed causing and stirring shit, simple as that. The turmoil in the city had provided her with a pair of easy targets - the cops and *Fusion*.

She knew full well that there were children with parents in the Chicago Police Department, at the school. It was also no secret that most of the school supported *Fusion* - there were even outlandish and

unconfirmed rumours that some of the kids who attended the school could even be *Fusion* members - as if! Juno and her cohorts happily voiced their thoughts over what they believed the CPD to have done the other evening. She also threw in some digs at how ineffective *Fusion* were in the city.

It took a lot of willpower for certain members of the student body to keep their tempers. A certain twelve-year-old girl sat with her boyfriend and she visualised ripping the sixteen-year-old's head off her neck. She hated the girl, and while Megan was not alone, she knew that she dared not do anything to risk exposure of her secret identity. There were other's in similar stages of anger: Chloe Bennett and her boyfriend, Joshua Williams, Brad Murphy and his girlfriend Lauren Edwards. Chloe and Lauren both had personal reasons to rip Juno's face off but they had had their fun months before and Juno gave them both a very wide birth indeed.

There was instant hate for the girl amongst the newer members of the school - all *Predators*. Over in a sheltered corner of the dining room, a sixteen-year-old girl thought that she had escaped drawing any attention to herself that day and that nobody had noticed her arrival at the school.

She was very, very wrong.

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***Two days later***  
***Wednesday, September 28<sup>th</sup>***

***Lake View High School***

"Happy Birthday, Lucy."

Lucy recognised the voice instantly - it was a voice which she had not heard in a long time but it was a voice which she would never forget. She turned to look toward the voice.

"Instructor?"

"It's Patrick now, Lucy. All that is gone."

Lucy saw two girls step out from behind the man she once knew as Instructor Millar. Both girls held pistols in their hands, pointed at the ground. Lucy smiled.

"Hi, Saoirse. Hi, Sarah."

"What are you doing here, Lucy?" Sarah demanded.

"I'm looking for help."

"The great Lucy Ford is looking for help?" Sarah responded derisively.

"I have to agree with Sarah - sorry, Lucy," Saoirse added.

Lucy took a deep breath before she continued.

"I know you two have no reason to like me. I broke your nose, Sarah, on your very first day and I treated you, Saoirse, like crap. I came to Chicago for help from you in particular; I knew that you were here, Saoirse. I also know that Hit Girl is here. I was made in her image and I know that she is not the woman those bastard instructors - sorry Mr Millar - say she is."

Patrick waved off the insinuation.

"Lucy - we don't trust you," Sarah said sharply. "We can't."

"I know - you have no reason to."

"No, we don't," Shannon growled as she came around the corner and shot Lucy with a Taser.

The look on Shannon's face was pure malice.