

**Tuesday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Safehouse E**

**Sub-Level 8**

**Room 25**

Bandit was awake.

And to say that she was unhappy was putting it mildly. The teenager was strapped to her bed by her wrists, chest, waist, and ankles. The straps were very necessary as at the moment she had regained consciousness and she had realised where she was, she had begun to yell and scream, struggling against her restraints. The girl froze as three people entered the room. The first was masked - Hit Girl, the second was a face from her distant past - Lucy Ford, the final one - Psyche, a face from the more recent past.

"You're alive - shame!" Stephanie growled.

"The feeling's mutual," Bandit commented.

"Willow," Lucy said. "We just want to talk."

"That is *not* my name!"

"What went wrong with you, Willow?" Lucy persisted.

"Let me the fuck outta here, dammit!"

Willow struggled against her restraints, turning the air blue as she fought to escape. She also went for the typical 'brainwashed-propaganda' routine.

"You cannot keep me here! You are vermin! She will destroy you and my brethren will come for me!"

"Who are your 'brethren', Willow?" Lucy asked calmly. "*Marauders* or *Predators*?"

"Fuck the *Predators* - they mean nothing to me!"

"Is that so?" Lucy commented. "If *Predators* mean so little to you, why did you go after Psyche?"

"She destroyed everything that I held dear - she caused my friends to die."

"Friends? *Predator* friends?"

"Stop fucking twisting my words!" Willow exploded.

"What are you?" Lucy demanded.

"As I told that little bitch, I am beyond a mere *Predator*, I am a *Marauder*. I may have been formed in your image, Hit Girl, but I have surpassed you; I am better than you."

Stephanie cringed, and she looked up at Hit Girl.

"I thought *your* ego was bad," she commented before clamming up as Hit Girl growled dangerously.

"I am sorry for what you were put through, Willow. I see that you were only ten-years-old when you were taken - that's a hard six years for you. I know what's like to lose your childhood and be coerced into something heinous," Hit Girl admitted. "We are here to help you - not to fight you. I know that you need an outlet - we can help you."

Willow appeared to be listening to Hit Girl but then she shook her head.

"NO!"

She began to rant again but then she seized up and the girl screamed out in pain. From her expression, it was in no way faked.

"Out!" Medic ordered as she swept in. "Out or heads will roll!"

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"Well, that went well!" Stephanie commented as Mindy reappeared from under her mask.

"You have a point, Steph - her ego *is* worse than mine."

"Not by much. . ." Stephanie muttered.

"Do you enjoy being in pain, honey?"

"I have somewhere to be, I'm sure of it," Stephanie stated as she headed down the corridor.

"Strange child!" Mindy growled and then she looked at Lucy. "You grinning?"

"No, ma'am!" Lucy replied.

"You think Stephanie's comment about my ego is funny?"

"A little. . ."

For a moment, Lucy thought that she might have just signed her own death warrant.

"You may be a girl, Lucy, but you have balls! Assuming I don't rip your head off, you might go far."

"Thanks - I think."

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### ***The following morning***

***Wednesday, October 12<sup>th</sup>***

They left Chicago behind in the mid-morning, heading southwest.

Stephanie and Tommy were in the backseat of the Jaguar XJ, talking. Mindy was watching them both and smirking.

"Driver!" Tommy called out. "Eyes front, please."

Mindy opened her mouth to respond but she laughed and concentrated on her driving. They had a fifty-mile drive in total which was expected to take around an hour - or 'Twenty minutes as Mum drives,' Stephanie had quipped before Mindy had flicked her left ear and she had squealed in pain. The drive was otherwise peaceful apart from several bursts of giggling from Stephanie. As the hour drew to a close, they passed directly between the jail and the quarry from which the jail was originally built. They did not stop, but continued past into the city of Joliet for lunch - the plan was to look like innocent tourists - but they were hungry, too.

After Stephanie and Tommy had stuffed themselves stupid - Mindy had filled herself, too - they headed north towards the jail. The place covered a large area on multiple sites. It would be a nightmare to assault - if not impossible. The towering stone walls intended to keep inmates in, were equally good at keeping people out. The same applied to the heavy steel-bound wooden gates and the caged catchment areas.

"Will you two stop with the hand-holding and the snogging!?" Mindy growled and the two pink-faced youngsters sprang apart, grinning.

Mindy found it creepy that her daughter, who was barely eight years her junior, was consorting with a boy. Besides, there was a time and a place for everything and a reconnaissance mission was not the place for hand-holding and snogging.

"I've spotted four guards on patrol," Tommy commented, getting back to the task at hand.

"Yeah - I go with four," Stephanie agreed.

Mindy had noticed the four men dressed as workers in hard hats and high visibility vests. They appeared to be 'maintaining' the area around the jail walls, but for a trained eye, they were patrolling, and they were all armed. Not far from each pair there appeared to be a cache of some sort which probably held heavier weapons. They had also spotted three teenagers, all with their heads shaved. Everything that they saw was being recorded by the ultra-high definition cameras mounted on the Jaguar for later inspection. As they watched, they saw the *Marauders* vanish behind some bushes and through a concealed doorway, hidden by the undergrowth.

FEAR's bolthole had been confirmed. The only problem was, what the hell could they do about it? According to Rachel, there were hundreds in there and storming the place would be very costly and *Fusion* did not have the numbers required for such an endeavour.

"The situation sucks," Tommy voiced for them all.

"We could lose a dozen just assaulting the main gate, let alone the unknown within," Mindy commented darkly.

"I agree," Stephanie said. "If we could sabotage them - a few explosions - it would hit their morale by showing them that they aren't safe from us anywhere."

"My thoughts, exactly!" Mindy said in a tone which showed how proud she was of her daughter. "Tomorrow night, the infiltrators can leave a few *gifts* behind."

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"You have a good trip?" Dave asked on their return.

"Not bad - we found out what we needed to know," Mindy replied. "Stephanie and Tommy enjoyed themselves - hope she isn't pregnant."

"MUM!"

"Did you, or did you not, have your hand on Tommy's crotch?" Mindy demanded of her very embarrassed daughter.

"Maybe . . . yes, okay, I rested my hand on his crotch."

"Did he like it?" Mindy teased.

"Never you mind!" a thoroughly mortified Stephanie growled before vanishing up the stairs.

"Steph sure did enjoy the kissing," Mindy said loudly.

"You are so evil," Dave chuckled.

"Yes, I am."

From up the stairs, Anne-Marie's American twang could be heard chanting.

"Stephanie and Tommy sitting in the tree, K - I - S - S - I - N - G!"

"I'd better go and prevent a murder," Dave suggested as he leapt up the stairs, taking them three at a time.

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Mindy and Dave spent a couple of hours going through the footage from the reconnaissance.

Marty and Abby had already done so and between the four of them, they concluded that FEAR had done very well when selecting her hideaway. Nonetheless, they would prepare Hailee and Saoirse for the operation with Shannon and Megan as their backup. Mindy knew that it would be very dangerous and there would be a very high risk to the infiltrator's wellbeing. All four girls had agreed to go - they would never back down; they knew what was at stake. Mindy hated having to split her forces, but it needed to be done. To cover the infiltration, they would have to put on a big show in the city to attract FEAR's attention and Mindy had some ideas for that.

If Mindy could chip away at FEAR's resources, along with those of the Russians and the Sicilians, then they might change Saturday night.

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### ***Safehouse Q***

They had spent near enough four weeks in their temporary home.

Libby Dade missed her own home, her own room, and her own bed. Jesse was much the same. As for their parents; they were still a little wide-eyed by the new world in which they had found themselves. They had been introduced to the famous - or infamous - Hit Girl and they were being protected by the best that Chicago, and arguably the entire USA, could offer.

Libby and Jesse were working their way, providing their skills to *Fusion* via *Synthesis*. Jesse had been forgiven for causing the forced re-homing in the first place - not that Libby mentioned it very often. For Libby, descending into her world of the Internet and the Dark Web was a suitable distraction from her enforced living away from her home. The opportunity to work on the fastest computers with idols such as Battle Guy and Hal was also worth any degradation in other parts of their lives. *Synthesis* had an ongoing task of attempting to crack FEAR's communications and her own computer network. They scoured the Dark Web following traces of FEAR's activities - they also found the Russians in that dark world, too.

Libby and her *Synthesis* colleague, Kate Bradford, were delving into the lives of the Russians, searching for some way to interrupt their operations.

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### ***Sheridan Road***

"You ready for tomorrow night?"

"Yes, Daddy - I'll be fine."

"So independent," Patrick Millar mused.

Shannon had been getting grumpy with her father's overbearing posture. Her shoulder slumped.

"Okay - thank you for caring."

"I love you very much, Shannon, despite what I did to your childhood."

"Daddy - we've talked about this; what's done is done and we cannot change the past, so let's just look forwards. I'm enjoying being back with my family and I know that you all love me just as much as I love each one of you."

"You double-check everything - I don't care how special a *Predator* you were."

"Lucy is helping me gear up; she won't let anything happen to me."

"She really helped you, didn't she?"

"Yes, Daddy, she did - I owe her everything and despite everything, I trust her."

"So, do I - you listen to that girl," her father cautioned, and Shannon nodded.

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### ***The next evening***

***Thursday, October 13<sup>th</sup>***

### ***Safehouse F***

"You've checked your pistols?"

"Yes."

"Clean?"

"Of course!"

"Operative?"

"Please!"

"Shannon - what have I taught you, exhaustively."

Shannon struggled to control her mounting temper.

"Check, double-check, re-check, then start again," Shannon recited.

"Clever girl!" Lucy grinned as she circled the thirteen-year-old.

"Lucy!"

"Shannon, honey, you're going to be fourteen in five days. I want you to still be alive to celebrate that day."

"I know - you and Dad are really getting on my nerves. I know, you both care about me and he trusts you."

"Ever since a certain nine-year-old turned up stark naked on my doorstep, I've taken care of her - even before I found out who your father was. I protected you and I turned a screwup into an awesome young lady who could kill like she was born to it."

"Yes, you did, Lucy, and I love you for it."

"Now - are your pistols one-hundred-percent?"

"Yes, ma'am. Cleaned, oiled, tested, magazines loaded loosely by me. Knives sharpened, bō-staff sharpened and polished."

"Clean panties?"

"Fresh tampon, too," Shannon grinned.

Lucy laughed. Shannon was very special to her for many reasons and being able to help her out before a mission felt good. Lucy mentally thanked Mindy for

allowing her to become part of the team - it was still early days, and Lucy knew that she was being watched, but she felt like she belonged.

"Don't I get the personal touch?" Saoirse asked with a hurt expression.

"You are old enough to sort yourself out, young lady," Lucy pointed out with a smile.

"I know - you ready, Stormy?" Foxtail grinned.

"I am going to slaughter that little brat!" Stormtide scowled.

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### **Joliet**

Dave had been out with Marty and they had acquired a pair of beaten-up old panel vans - driving in *Fusion* transport would just alert FEAR via the spies she most definitely had.

Tony Morgan had checked the vehicles over and pronounced them sound. He would be driving the first of the two vans while Emily Edwards would drive the second. Petra and Foxtail would ride with Ares while Stormtide and Wildcat would ride with Athena. Astute and Leon were to provide an extra layer of support as required - they would travel independently of the vans and take up Overwatch positions.

It was going to be a highly-dangerous operation, but it was an essential operation, nonetheless, and both girls knew it.

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Later, that evening, the two vans pulled off the 171 Highway outside of Joliet, one to the left and one to the right.

The van being driven by Ares had turned left off the highway. Ares made several turns before he slowed for just two seconds on Englewood Avenue giving Petra and Foxtail the time they needed to jump from the van. They hit the ground, rolled, and came up onto their feet before they both dived into the undergrowth and made their way into the trees.

"Petra, clear!"

"Foxtail, clear!"

Both girls reported in before they pulled out their NVG gear. The displays came to life and the built-in HUD gave them their course and the display showed them a crystal-clear view of what was ahead of them with a hint of green.

"Heading of 208 degrees," Foxtail said as she took point.

Both girls held the same rank within *Fusion* but Petra, despite being older than Foxtail, deferred to the younger girl due to her more extensive training. The two girls moved off through the dark trees, heading towards the jail, a little over twelve-hundred yards away. The long approach was required to protect the two vigilantes from detection.

The two girls kept up a fast pace, moving quietly, checking their surroundings and covering each other as they went.

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### **Thirty miles to the northwest**

### **South Independence Boulevard**

## **Chicago**

The roadblock was made up of nine vehicles blocking both sides of the twin bridges over the 290 Expressway.

"Hey!" one of the men on watch called out. "Something's coming."

The throaty roar echoed down the empty street to the north. Most Chicagoans were safely ensconced in their homes, despite it barely being nine in the evening. As the men gazed down the dark street, a very large dark form moved from streetlight to streetlight.

"Fuck!" another exclaimed. "It's their big fucker!"

As *Titan* advanced toward the roadblock, two more vehicles revealed themselves.

"Shit! Two more armoured vehicles - hidden behind the big one."

*Sentinel* and *Hound* took up position on either side of *Titan*. A moment later, the men began to crap themselves as *Hound* to *Titan's* left, moved further over and *Iron Hide* appeared. In the load bed of the truck stood Kick-Ass, his hands on a mounted pair of M134 mini-guns. Two motorcycles finished off the masterful display of power.

"We've got Hit Girl and Mist, too!"

With a burst of flame, two-foot-long, the M134s opened fire with the sound of a dozen chainsaws. Three of the cars were chewed up and one exploded.

"Fuck this; I ain't paid enough for this shit!" the leader yelled as he ran to safety.

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*Titan* made short work of the remaining vehicles on the southbound bridge, smashing them to one side so that the other vehicles and the motorcycles could tear through.

The men had been hired by the Solntsevskaya Brotherhood to cause mayhem and distract *Fusion*, however, they were slaughtered as the 7.62-millimetre bullets shredded steel and flesh alike. Hit Girl and Mist brought their motorcycles to a halt and they quickly joined the fight with blades and whip. The fight did not last long as the hired mercenaries began to rapidly dissipate under the weight of the intensive firepower which was being brought to bear. The leader of the mercenaries was on his cell phone, reporting to his boss.

"Err, Boss - they smashed straight through and we ain't got no cars left. . ."

"Do you think I give a fucking shit? Go get some more cars, you stupid dumb fuck!"

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## **Three thousand yards to the southwest**

"The mercs have just been attacked," Sunset Phoenix.

"Don't tell me," FEAR growled. "It was Hit Girl."

Sunset Phoenix just nodded.

"Get the Corsairs over there," FEAR ordered. "Let's move!"

FEAR jumped into a Humvee and her armour-clad Corsair driver put his foot down while Sunset Phoenix followed along, behind, on her motorcycle.

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## **Joliet**

The two armour-clad vigilantes had paused at the old firing range which belonged to the prison.

It was almost totally dark and that aided the two girls as they made their way around the small facility and they made for the railroad tracks. To their right, through the gloom, they could make out the long-abandoned quarry building which stuck up tall and proud with a slightly spooky look in the darkness. With a burst of speed, they crossed the twin railroad tracks and they then took the long route around the annex which was located to the east of the main jail, on their side of the 171 Highway.

They ran forwards, towards an old gas station turned store, taking cover in trees beside the forecourt. The guard towers were occupied, although it was only possible to make out there was somebody in there by using infra-red sensors. As the guard in the closest tower turned away, they both bolted across the highway and into the cover of the imposing jail annex building. With a quick check around the area, Petra fired a small rope cannon which sent a thin rope soaring into the air and down onto the roof of the two-storey annex. While Foxtail kept watch, Petra pulled back on the rope until the grappling hook at the end made secure purchase on the roof.

A minute later, both girls were on the roof and hauling up the line before dropping it down the inside of the annex and the inside of the jail boundary.

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## **South Independence Boulevard**

### **Chicago**

"Oh, joy!" Kick-Ass growled.

"Break is over!" Hit Girl announced as everybody sprang to their feet.

*Corsairs* were spilling out of side-streets as they converged on the Fusion diversionary team.

"I hate the fucking waiting!" FRage called out as he jumped up.

"Time for the fuckin' killin'!" Fury confirmed as she too jumped to her feet.

"Leave some for the rest of us - greedy bitch!" Nightmare suggested.

"Bet I get one first, Fury," Cut-Throat challenged.

"Show some decorum, please!" Hit Girl chuckled. "I always get the first kill."

"Full of herself, ain't she?" Cut-Throat declared to Kick-Ass who just shrugged.

"Move it!" Shadow announced as she ran forwards with Nightmare close behind.

The fight started in earnest, with Hit Girl drawing first blood, closely followed by Fury.

"Try to keep up, Hit Girl!" she yelled as she attacked the next *Corsair*.

"God, I hate *Predators*!" Hit Girl growled as she artfully drove her blade into a man's heart, cutting through his armour, like a knife through butter.



Rage and Fury covered each other as they dived into the hoards of *Corsairs* as they came together and made for *Fusion*. Then Hit Girl smirked behind her mask as she saw FEAR arrive along with the pink abortion.

"Oh, how sweet!" Sunset Phoenix preened. "Hit Girl's brought the kiddies!"

Rage and Fury did not take kindly to being referred to as 'kiddies' and they both made for the pink princess.

"She is *such* a cock!" Fury growled as she parried away the incoming blade with her bō-staff, spinning so that Rage could lay his Messer sword on the bitch.

Sunset Phoenix screamed out in pain as the sword struck her armour and she caught Rage on his back with her double-bladed ninja sword staff sending the boy reeling. Shadow cut in, clashing blades with the pink-clad menace and driving her back, away from Rage and Fury. Shadow hated it when the younger members of *Fusion* were targeted - irrelevant of whether those younger members enjoyed being targeted or not.

Fury was annoyed at having her trophy removed from her grasp by Shadow but rather than let it get to her, she just hacked off a *Corsair's* leg instead.

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## **Joliet**

It was ominously quiet.

It was also obvious that they were not expecting an assault on the facility - FEAR probably assumed that her facility would never be discovered. Foxtail did not trust FEAR and she never took anything for granted. Both she and Petra moved slowly but purposefully towards the main building, located just inside the east wall of the jail. Just as they reached the wall, they froze as a door opened and two youngsters spilled out into the darkness. They were chatting animatedly as they left the dining hall and they headed directly towards what used to be the jail commissary.

Foxtail darted forwards and she caught the door before it clicked shut.

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Inside, they found that FEAR had not wasted any money on redecorating - the place reeked of damp and the paint was mainly in flakes on the floor instead of on the walls and ceiling.

The same care had gone into the lighting which was spotty to say the least - not that the pair minded; it assisted them in their stealth as they made their way towards what used to be the three-storey hospital building. Infra-red had shown a concentration of bodies in the building, so it was probably where most of the *Corsairs* and *Marauders* lived. They followed a long corridor which led past a large dining hall - with several kids and adults stuffing their faces - and on a bit further before they paused. There was some form of a ruckus going on a few doors down. As the pair came closer, they were able to hear the words.

"I didn't do anything - get your fucking hands off me!"

As they approached, they stopped as soon as they could see through a partly opened doorway where there was a bad scene evolving before them. A young girl, of maybe seventeen, was being hounded by seven teenaged youths, all with shaven heads - *Marauders*. The girl did not appear to be a *Marauder*; she had long blonde hair which was tied up in a ponytail for a start. The girl was being forced up against a wall by six of the kids while a seventh stood off to one side.

"What's she supposed to have done?" the seventh demanded.

"Hey, Zealous - we caught her accessing a secure computer terminal," another voice replied.

"You know *who* she is, don't you, Defiant?"

"She was copying data onto a USB stick - she tried to hide it, but I got it."

"My sister will hear of this!" the first voice growled.

To Foxtail, the voice was somehow familiar.

"Oh, yes, she *will* hear of this - you betrayed FEAR and she *will* kill you," Defiant responded, his tone full of glee. "You, Dread, you are fucking finished!"

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"Dread!" Foxtail growled - now that was a target worth taking out. "Let's take 'em down, Petra!"

"On your six, Foxy!"

Foxy growled at the comment as she drew her twin Butterfly swords while Petra drew a pair of Tanto blades from her back. They both moved quickly, Petra kicking open the door and Foxtail diving into the room. The nearest *Marauder*, a girl, never knew what hit her as Foxtail drove the hilt of one of her swords into the side of her head - she dropped like a sack of potatoes. Her compatriots turned on the two attackers and a vicious fight ensued. To a *Marauder*, they each drew a blade from various places and they moved to attack. It was seven against two as the pony-tailed girl had also drawn a blade and moved into an attack position.

Foxtail and Petra had both been briefed by Hit Girl to keep any killing to the adult *Corsairs*, and where possible, to incapacitate the *Marauders*. Foxtail had agreed, as if things had turned out differently, she might very well have ended up as a *Marauder* - even Psyche had conceded that point for herself, too. However, the *Marauder's* had only brought knives to what was really a sword fight, so they were overreached in a big way. Petra flipped a young girl over and ensured that she smacked her head into the wooden floor - enough to knock her out but not enough to cause any permanent injury. Foxtail was taking them down two at a time as a boy and another girl received strikes to the heads simultaneously putting both out cold. Foxtail was then physically thrown across the room by a large boy who appeared more than a little angry.

"Foxtail!" he growled as he kicked Foxtail back down as she tried to regain her feet.

Foxtail's armour protected her, and she fought the boy who was remarkably strong which gave him an edge - only he was a boy and that fact was confirmed when an armoured gauntlet found something delicate, a pair actually, and the boy yelled out in agony before Foxtail put him out cold with a punch to his face. The final pair went down to Petra leaving Dread backing up against a wall. Foxtail drew one of her Beretta Px4 Storm Compact Type pistols and screwed on a suppressor - Dread had to die. The veteran *Fusion* vigilante raised the pistol up towards the supposed leader of the *Marauders* and she aimed directly at the bitch's cringing face.

She squeezed the trigger.

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## ***South Racine Avenue and South Blue Island Avenue***

The bullet struck the police officer dead centre in his chest.

The nine-millimetre round was what cops colloquially referred to as a cop-killer; the bullet was designed to pierce body armour and therefore, the round was illegal, but that was no consolation to Sergeant Paul Murphy as the bullet tore through his high-end body armour, clothing, his body, and then the reverse as it powered out of his back and continued on its way into the brick structure of the 12<sup>th</sup> District headquarters, a dozen yards beyond.

His sternum was smashed and both lungs were punctured causing blood to erupt from his mouth as he fell to the road. The bastard, who had fired the deadly round, was falling to the ground a mere second later, his head mushrooming into a cloud of blood, bone, and brain matter as Sergeant Sam Fellowes fired off three rounds from his Glock. Once the man was down, and while keeping the suspect covered, he keyed his radio.

"Ten-One, squad! Officer down, South Racine and South Blue Island! Suspect, code nine!"

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## ***Joliet***

The girl stared into the gaping muzzle and then past it into the dark brown and light orange mask which obscured the wearer's features - only one thing might save her life at that moment, and she hoped that the vigilante before her had been well briefed.

"Stardust! Stardust!"

The codewords registered on Foxtail's brain and her eyes went wide as she instinctively tipped up her pistol just as her finger squeezed the trigger, sending the bullet into the wall an inch above Kelly's head. Kelly breathed out in relief as she sagged to the ground amidst the fallen *Marauders*. Petra had frozen at the codewords and she was trying to figure out what the hell was going on and what to do next.

Foxtail holstered her pistol and she reached down to the girl whom she had almost shot dead.

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## ***South Independence Boulevard***

### ***Chicago***

Hit Girl was feeling more than a little pleased with herself as FEAR and her cohorts retreated down a side street.

Amongst the fallen bodies, another body stood out, its body armour like a beacon amongst the dark greys of the *Corsairs*. Hit Girl strode over, and she rolled Sunset Phoenix over onto her back. Finally, one of their adversaries was no more. Then Hit Girl heard something, and the lips moved imperceptibly below the mask,

"Medic!" Hit Girl bellowed.

Then everything began to happen, all at once.

"*Hit Girl!*" Hal called over the communications.

"Go ahead."

"We have an officer down outside 12<sup>th</sup> District - it's Murphy."

"Fuck!" Hit Girl breathed at the revelation.

"We've also had a report from Joliet - Stardust."

"Fuck!"

"Foxtail and Petra are making their escape with Stardust."

"Send in Wildcat and Stormtide - ensure Stardust is kept safe; delouse and bring her to Foxtrot," Hit Girl ordered.

Beyond the increasingly distressed vigilante, Medic was hard at work with Mist and Hawk as they stabilised Sunset Phoenix for transport in *Titan*.

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## **Joliet**

Foxtail moved towards the door, leading Dread, but then Dread pulled away and she ran over towards a boy lying on the floor.

Petra moved to intercept Dread who raised her hands.

"He has something of mine - please."

"Slowly," Petra warned.

Dread knelt down beside the boy and she rapidly frisked him before grinning broadly as she held up a USB drive.

"My sister's plans for 'global domination'!"

"Let's move, Dread. . ." Petra announced.

"That is not my name - I am Fortune from this point on."

"Okay, Fortune - we need to move," Petra directed as Foxtail checked the corridor, outside.

"Clear!" Foxtail announced as she moved out into the corridor.

Fortune followed with Petra guarding their behind. The three girls ran down the corridor towards the exit. Before they could reach it, two *Corsairs* appeared out of the dining room without warning directly in between Foxtail and Fortune. Without hesitation, Fortune took out the closest man, snapping his neck with a loud snapping sound. The other man fell to Petra.

"I hate those bastards!" Fortune exclaimed as she glared down at the dead man.

"Let's move, girl!"

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Wildcat and Stormtide broke cover and they made for the jail.

They were both a little confused to find that there would be an additional person to exfiltrate, but that was the name of the game and they could cope with undocumented changes. The two vigilantes paused under the cover of the last trees beside the castellated gatehouse of the jail. Two hundred yards to the south, Ares waited in his panel van, with Athena in the other van, two hundred yards to the north of the jail. They were all ready to assist in the extraction as soon as their colleagues requested help. Wildcat was itching for some action - there was a bloodlust building within her which needed attention, and soon.

Stormtide had her own bloodlust but for very different reasons - her past had given her a lust for killing which she had been able to fulfil while in London, however, the lust was being satisfied but only so far under her new regime as a *Fusion* vigilante.

"You ready, partner?" Wildcat asked as they waited.

"Always, Miss Wildcat."

Shannon and Megan got on well together. Neither knew why, but they enjoyed each other's company and they were comfortable when together as a team, fighting the enemy. At first, Shannon had felt considerably superior to the younger girl - Megan was not yet twelve and she had nowhere near the training that Shannon, a *Predator*, had under her belt - but events had taken care of that and Megan's skills, not to mention her courage, were obvious. Stephanie had assured Shannon that just because they had not been trained as *Predators*, did not mean that the younger members of *Fusion* were not fully capable.

"Any idea on our extra body?"

"Not a damn clue!" Stormtide replied.

"Where the fuck are they? Surprised they haven't been detected. . .?"

Wildcat was interrupted by the sound of shouting coming from within the compound.

"Never mind," Wildcat growled as she broke cover and made for the exterior annex wall.

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Back within the jail walls, things had gone a little bit awry.

"I think we have company," Fortune pointed out as six *Corsairs* and three *Marauders* came running towards them from another building.

Pistols appeared, and the ground around the feet of the three girls began to react to the bullets striking it, sending puffs of dirt and grass into the air. Foxtail and Petra engaged with their own pistols, but the *Corsairs* and *Marauders* were finding good cover which neither Foxtail nor Petra could impinge from where they were. Neither could they escape without being shot and their accomplice wore no armour.

"Overwatch - a little help here!" Petra called over the comms.

"By your command, Petra," came the cryptic response.

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A little over a thousand yards to the northeast, Leon was comfortably placed to assist on one of the very few stable high-points for miles.

Her optics allowed her to see directly into the compound and the nine warm bodies might as well have been floodlit for all the darkness mattered. She targeted the *Corsairs*, steadying her breathing, just as three moved forwards and they crossed over. With a smirk, she squeezed the trigger.

"Bet you never did that, Leon," she muttered to herself.

...\_...

Foxtail was stunned to see three *Corsairs* suddenly fall forwards and drop to the ground before lying still. She had heard the muted rifle round, but only one - three with a *single* shot?

"Damn!" she growled.

A head exploded on the shoulders of another *Corsair* drenching a nearby *Marauder* with blood and a lot of other bodily crap. The *Marauder* fell back, disorientated but diving for cover, as were his compatriots. The chaotic environment allowed Foxtail and Petra to get Fortune up the rope and onto the of the annex. Petra followed behind while Foxtail covered. Then with Petra providing covering fire, Foxtail scaled the same wall before yanking up the rope and throwing it over the other side, towards safety.

"*Fire in the hole!*"

Petra yanked Fortune down to the roof just as the guard tower to their left exploded seconds after a loud whooshing sound came to an end. Stone, tiles, glass, and body parts rained down all around the girls. Petra covered Fortune with her own body and armour to protect her from the fiery shrapnel.

"*Southeast tower disabled,*" came Astute's terse explanation.

Foxtail shoved Fortune to the roof edge and handed her the rope.

"Go - others will meet you on the ground."

Fortune vanished over the edge, rapidly roping down the side of the annex and glad to finally have solid ground back under her feet.

"This way," an electronically enhanced voice growled out of the darkness.

Fortune recognised Wildcat and one other, following them both towards the parking lot. With a squeal of tyres, a panel van appeared from beyond some trees and headed directly for them, coming to a halt, the side door open. Fortune was bundled inside, followed by Wildcat and Stormtide.

"Ares is loaded - we're outta here - three pax!"

Just as Ares exited the parking lot, another panel van appeared. Foxtail and Petra dived through the open side door and that van followed the first.

"*Athena loaded and heading north - two pax.*"

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## **An hour later**

### **Safehouse M**

The woman had been stripped enroute within the confines of Hound.

Her wounds were not serious, but her armour and weapons were all removed and encased in Faraday bags to protect from trackers. Nonetheless, she was being held in a secure steel facility which blocked all communication and electronic signals. The, as yet unidentified woman, was young, maybe nineteen-years-old. Apart from the large bruise on her forehead, she was very beautiful. Hit Girl's blade had pierced the woman's armour and driven into her left side, narrowly missing anything important.

For added security, she was strapped to the hospital bed while Medic treated her wounds. They had searched her armour and weapons, but they had found but one thing which pointed towards anything. Around her right wrist, there was a simple silver bracelet inscribed with a name: *Kara*. That got Hit Girl thinking - that name had cropped up some months before around the time that Stephanie had been attacked while in the hospital.

Her finger prints were being run at that very moment.

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## ***Northwestern Memorial Hospital***

Stephanie and Mindy entered unsure of what they might find.

They found Rachel Murphy struggling to keep it together while Abigail and Brad sat on chairs, hugging each other for comfort. Stephanie made straight for her former nemesis and allowed her to sob on her shoulder for several minutes. Mindy did her best talking with Rachel, but Mindy was not the best when it came to major-league emotional scenes. Her husband was in surgery being operated on by the best the hospital had - his chances were slim, but they were going to do everything possible to ensure that two kids did not lose their father.

As far as Abigail was concerned, Paul Murphy was her Dad, and that was what she was calling him. Just as she was getting her life back together, the ten-year-old - she was to be eleven in just a few hours - now faced her life being torn apart. She was angry that despite her skills, she could not have prevented the attack on a man she respected and looked up to.

"I finally had what I wanted, Steph; I had a Dad, just like you."

"I know, Abigail, I know. He'll pull through, I know it," Stephanie replied.

Despite their past, Stephanie wanted only the best for her former enemy. Abigail was a great girl, now they had got to know each other as friends rather than as two damaged children determined to destroy one another.

"Whatever you need, Abigail, I'll be there for you."

Mindy was angry. The city needed to be brought back under control, and soon, to prevent such a disastrous event from reoccurring. Rachel needed to stay at the hospital, so Mindy had suggested she take the two kids back with them. On the way out of the hospital, Brad stopped Mindy and he glared up at her through his tears.

"I want in."

"Welcome, Rapier," Mindy replied.