

My name is Chloe Bennett and my world has quite literally been blasted apart. I have lost the most important person in my life. I am broken and even now I have no idea how I can continue.

Sunday, October 16th, 2016

04:50

Training Facility Echo

Level 1

The injured were just arriving back at the facility.

Brad had been awaiting the arrival of Lauren who was in a lot of pain. He was instructed to remove what he could of her combat suit and they would cut off the rest. Taylor prepared for the surgery with the assistance of Emily. Ares was on hand to take away Lauren's weapons and equipment. By the time Taylor came for her, the girl's boots, socks, and upper combat suit was gone, leaving just a sports bra covering her upper body. Tears streamed down her face as Brad helped her to her feet and Taylor assisted the girl onto a bed where she lay on her back while the lower half of her combat suit was cut off. All the time, Lauren squeezed tight on Brad's hand refusing to let him go. Lauren had glared at her mother when Emily had suggested that Brad should leave until the surgery was over.

Once the combat suit was removed, along with Lauren's underwear, the girl was rolled onto her right side, so that Taylor could clean around the wound in the girl's left thigh. It was not the first time that Brad had seen Lauren naked, but he did his best not to look anywhere his eyes did not belong which had Emily grinning and the boy blushing. Once the wound had been cleaned, a surgical cover was placed over the girl's thigh exposing just the jagged piece of aluminium. A mobile X-ray machine was pulled over and Taylor took her time taking careful images of the area prior to any removal - she was concerned about an artery having been nicked.

Lauren received a large dose of local anaesthetic while Brad continued to hold her hand and she stared up into his eyes for comfort while Taylor probed the wound.

05:15

West Harrison Street Bridge

Jackal was nowhere near his daughter when Scamp made her move.

She drew her Benchmade Model 62 Balisong, flicking it open, and slashing the bastard's stomach open as he brought the machete down towards the little girl. The men bellowed in pain, but the slash was nothing as far as the raging killer was concerned, only Scamp reached up and she rammed a small object into the gash before she dived underneath *TITAN* while shouting four words over the radio.

"Fire in the hole!"

Jackal dived to the ground, pulling Cut-Throat with him as he caught onto what Scamp had done. With a loud bang, the V40 mini-frag grenade detonated inside the over-sized Sicilian's stomach, blasting the asshole to kingdom come in a cloud of blood, guts, and body parts. A good-sized chunk of large intestine

slapped down onto *TITAN*'s windshield while a section of what could have been a lung slapped Jackal around the face. He glared down at his daughter as she emerged from under the giant armoured vehicle.

"Really!?" Jackal growled as he flipped the chunk of flesh onto the roadway.

Scamp just shrugged innocently.

05:30

Training Facility Echo

Level 1

While Lauren was undergoing surgery, Marc lay two beds over, unconscious.

The boy lay on his front and apart from the sheet covering his body, he was naked, a large dressing on his lower back. Paige had undressed the boy with the assistance of Anne-Marie and Stephanie. For the moment, the boy was stable, but he would have a painful recovery ahead of him. It was with great satisfaction that they had heard about the end of the Russians. It was even better news to hear that the Sicilians had finally ceased to be a viable threat.

"Stephanie, Anne-Marie; go get yourselves cleaned up - especially you, Stephanie; you stink of Lake Michigan," Paige directed.

"I did kind of get dumped into said lake," Stephanie pointed out as she and Anne-Marie headed off to tow their weapons, remove their combat suits, and shower.

It was not yet over - the city still had pockets of resistance remaining to be mopped up, not to mention FEAR.

05:35

West Van Buren Street Bridge

Hit Girl was blind-sided by FEAR as the larger and stronger fighter smashed Hit Girl's Katana from her left hand.

There was no time to sweep up the fallen blade as FEAR pushed forwards, forcing Hit Girl to rely on a single blade. FEAR's sword was heavier, and it struck with a large amount of force. With a single blade, Hit Girl would struggle to fight back without damaging or snapping, her remaining blade. FEAR decided to fight dirty as she kicked out and her foot caught Hit Girl in the left thigh. Hit Girl maintained her balance, but the strike had been a hard one, hurting Hit Girl. She filed away the pain until a later time and she continued to fight. The fight had been ongoing for over an hour and the pair had moved a distance from the bridge. FEAR had to be struggling as Hit Girl was digging deep to find the very last of her energy reserves. The actual sword-to-sword fighting had been measured in minutes as they had spent time taunting each other, an important time where both could rest their arms and other muscles.

The fight moved towards the Lower Wacker Drive underpass entry at its southern point. There the fighting intensified, and Hit Girl was able to shove FEAR backwards against the guardrail. FEAR became unbalanced and another kick sent her over the edge. Hit Girl dived after her, closely followed by Fortune, Rage, and Fury. By the time Rage and Fury had dropped themselves down, Hit Girl and FEAR were re-engaged with Fortune guarding Hit Girl's rear. The clash of the blades resounded around the concrete roadway echoing from end to end. A *Corsair*

appeared out of nowhere and he levelled a weapon at Hit Girl - Rage dropped him with a perfect pistol shot between the eyes.

Another interloper appeared, and Fury moved to intercept the *Marauder*.

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It was a female *Marauder*, that was certain.

Fury fired off three rounds from her Heckler & Koch P30SK pistol narrowly missing the girl who appeared to be a year or so older than Fury. Several bullets missed the diminutive Fury by a whisker as the youngster dove over the concrete barrier which separated the two roadways.

"Who are you, bitch?" Fury shouted, her yell echoing around the concrete structure.

"They call me Intrepid and you must be Fury," came the reply. "You look a little stunted, but I can handle that."

"Go fuck yourself, you mother-fucking lesbian!" Fury retorted as she brought her bō-staff around and she entered into Battle.

Intrepid produced a wicked looking pair of combat machetes and she stood her ground. She wore dark grey body armour very similar to that of a *Corsair* with an armoured mask over her face and protecting her head. The cold steel clashed, adding to the echo of steel clashing from fifty yards away where Hit Girl and FEAR were engaged. Fury could tell that the older girl was tired, but then so was Fury. Intrepid was no more than Phase 2 by her age and skill set, but Fury was better, and she had better armour allowing her to take some added risks.

"Give it up!" Fury instructed.

"I can't - she'll kill me."

"She's all but dead, Intrepid - join us."

Intrepid did not respond, instead she dove at Fury, driving both machetes towards the younger girl's neck. Fury responded and blocked the heavy attack, falling backwards under the weight of the strike. Intrepid took advantage of that and she struck again, and again. Fury yelled out in pain as a blade struck her left arm, causing some painful bruising but no damage to her suit. Fury was angry, she hated to be on the defensive, so she lived up to her name and she rolled away from Intrepid before flipping back to her feet and surprising the older girl.

Intrepid went on the defensive as the double-ended bō-staff with the razor-sharp blades and pointed tips came dangerously close as it was expertly wielded by Fury. Then the girl was struck on the right shoulder, the blade digging into what she had believed to be heavy armour. The strike had shaken Intrepid and she momentarily considered Fury's offer, only she was uncertain as to whether she might still die in the hands of *Fusion* - or get sent to prison for the rest of her natural life - so she opted to continue the fight. It was not the best decision that the young British girl had made that day as Fury struck her armour for a second time. Only, the blade went clean through the armour and Intrepid screamed out in pain as she felt the blade cut into the soft flesh of her left shoulder before the blade was yanked back out and Fury spun around cracking the older girl around the head with the handle of the bō-staff knocking the girl to the ground.

Fury pushed the attack as Intrepid brought up her pistol which Fury kicked out of her gloved hands and she brought the tip of a bō-staff blade down in an

attempt to scare Intrepid into submission, only the older girl shifted, and the keen blade cut through the weaker abdomen armour and neatly sliced open the twelve-year-old's belly. Intrepid screamed an unearthly scream which echoed around the underpass. The combat machetes clattered to the roadway and the girl's gloved hands grasped at her armour in an attempt to get to the wound. Fury dropped her bō-staff and she tried to calm the wounded girl down.

"This is Fury, I need medical support Lower Wacker Drive!" she radioed.

Fury found the clips for the body armour and she flipped off the front section, revealing a combat shirt soaked in blood. Fury drew her combat knife and she slit the shirt away to reveal the girl's belly, fresh blood oozing out of the precision wound. Intrepid attempted to reach her wound so Fury cuffed her with flexicuffs and secured her wrists to a suitable piece of equipment nearby. The girl screamed in agony and she begged for help.

"I'm trying to help you - what's your name?"

The girl continued to scream.

"What's your name?" Fury repeated as she pulled out a field dressing and then realised that it wouldn't be big enough.

"Charlie. . ."

"Okay, Charlie, you're going to be fine - time to take a page out of the Psyche book of First Aid."

Fury jumped up and she ran over to an abandoned police car and she opened the trunk (she called it the boot) and she rummaged around before finding what she was looking for. Fury rushed back to the screaming, struggling girl and she knelt down beside her. Fury cleaned off the wound with the field dressing and then she grabbed up the item which she had appropriated from the police car.

"This was good enough for Psyche and Rigour, so. . ."

Fury ripped off a long length of black Duct Tape before gently applying it the length of the wound on the girl's belly. A few more pieces of tape were added before Fury was satisfied and she stayed with the girl to await medical assistance.

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A couple dozen yards back down the roadway, Hit Girl stumbled over a road fitting and she fell back.

FEAR attempted to take advantage of the fall, but Fortune moved into the fight, parrying her sister's strike before it came near to Hit Girl. The pair of them fought, FEAR seeing just another young vigilante for her to put down - she knew that none could defeat her. Hit Girl had done well, but it was only a matter of time. The operation had gone badly but she was still alive and on the verge of defeating the obnoxious purple vigilante known as Hit Girl. However, her latest adversary was not a bad fighter with good skills when it came to sword fighting. FEAR decided to enjoy the fight as Hit Girl appeared to have stepped to one side for a few moments.

"A fresh one, eh - who might you be?" FEAR growled

The swords clashed, echoing around the lower level. FEAR was impressed by the power behind the blows - was there something driving the vigilante? Maybe she had lost somebody close to her?

"Me?" Fortune growled back as she parried another strike. "I'm Fortune."

FEAR actually laughed at the name - to her it appeared so perfect.

"Well, Fortune, you've met your end - very un-*fortune*-ate."

FEAR brought her sword down towards the interloper whom she knew as Fortune, but the young vigilante did not hesitate as she brought up her own blade. FEAR frowned as she realised that she would need to up her game - she had underestimated the youngster. The youngster had jumped up onto the concrete structure which separated the two sections of roadway, gaining a height advantage on FEAR. But FEAR responded with a dive forwards, striking hard at Fortune and forcing the girl backwards while FEAR continued over the barrier hitting the roadway and coming up onto her feet and striking at Fortune from the rear. Hit Girl made a move forwards, but she stopped at a single order from Fortune: "No!"

"You want to know *what* I was called *before* I was Fortune?" the girl inquired as she came close to FEAR, forcing the seasoned fighter backwards with her sword.

"Don't see why?" FEAR responded offhandedly as she pushed back and brought her sword around and down towards the girl.

Fortune dived to one side, rolling on the ground before returning to her feet, and turning off the speech synthesiser before she responded. Fortune picked the moment to speak again, just as FEAR was closing on her.

"I was known as Dread, dear sister."

It was like FEAR had just been slapped across the face by a wet kipper. It was the very last sentence she could ever have imagined, not to mention the very last voice she had expected to hear. She was certain that her younger sister had sided with Hit Girl, but for her to be *fighting* alongside Hit Girl!? FEAR hesitated for a moment as the name sunk in and her sword missed Fortune by a wide margin, however, the hesitation had cost FEAR gravely and Hit Girl quickly took advantage. Hit Girl's blade drove hard into FEAR's left side, cutting through the armour. The blade pierced flesh and internal organs, sealing FEAR's fate. FEAR tensed up and she screamed out in agony as Hit Girl twisted the blade viciously causing massive internal bleeding. Hit Girl looked over to Fortune and the veteran vigilante took a step back, away from FEAR.

Fortune stepped in and without hesitation, she drove her own blade into her sister's stomach. FEAR dropped to her knees and her war sword clattered to the road surface as her hands went to her stomach, gripping Fortune's blade which had impaled her. FEAR looked up at her sister.

"Why? How could you side with *her*? She killed our father and she caused the death of our mother. *She* is the enemy - not *me*. I am your sister!"

Fortune yanked at her sword, dragging it out of her sister's stomach.

"You betrayed our parents' memory with what you have done to this city, Katrina. I am too ashamed to see you as my sister. You have to die; it is the only way that I can save you," Fortune said as she drove the blade accurately and savagely into her sister's heart, severing the organ in two.

"Kelly. . . I . . .," FEAR tried as she fell onto her back.

"From this moment on, I have no sister," Fortune growled as she again yanked her sword from her sister's body.

FEAR never made another sound as she lay perfectly still but Fortune wanted to make absolutely sure that her sister would never hurt another soul. Fortune picked up her sister's heavy war sword and raised it upwards before bringing it

down and severing the head of Katrina Wright, finally ending FEAR's five-month reign of tyranny. Hit Girl knelt down and she moved FEAR's head a few inches from the body. She then looked up at Fortune.

"I think she might be dead," Hit Girl said.

"Good," Fortune said without emotion.

"We have one more task," Hit Girl explained as *HOUND* arrived with Hawk to attend to Fury and her captured *Marauder*.

Together, Hit Girl, Fortune, and Rage hauled the parts of FEAR up to ground level so that all could see that FEAR was no more.

06:36

The dawn was breaking on a new day.

As the light began to force its way between the skyscrapers of the windy city, the palls of smoke curled their way skyward. The fighting appeared over. The survivors, be they *Fusion*, CPD, CFD, or just average Chicago citizens, they were exhausted and more than happy to see the dawn. It took several moments for those standing in the dawn's early light to notice that the guns had fallen silent and the sounds of steel clashing on steel were no more.

When FEAR had died, the fight had gone out of her *Corsairs*, not to mention the remaining Russians and the surviving Sicilians who all chose to flee for their lives. An unexpected bonus was the capture of one Helen Geno. Kick-Ass appeared very happy with himself as he stood guard over his prey who lay hogtied on the blacktop. He would be insufferable, Hit Girl thought as she savoured the feeling of supremacy. She had dominated FEAR and she had won back the city of Chicago which had returned to the protection of *Fusion* - and *Fusion* alone.

Twelve hours of fighting was over.

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The victorious city was jubilant.

Fusion was being fêted by all, as were the CPD and the CFD. The Chicago Police Department had things under control, so *Fusion* demobilised and returned to the Safehouse. Hit Girl, Medic, and Jackal remained out on the streets to maintain a presence of order and for Medic to treat the wounded. Kick-Ass was eager to incarcerate his prisoner in a holding cell at the nearest police station so that Voight could begin interrogating the woman.

The enormous task of clearing up the city was able to get under way.

07:15

Training Facility Echo

Level 1

Lauren was asleep, following her operation, and Brad was busy assisting the returning vigilantes.

Food was available in the dining room, under the watchful eyes of Stephanie and Anne-Marie. The food was being prepared by Rachel Murphy and Sharon Fellowes. Kyle and Tony were on hand to collect weapons and equipment from each returning vigilante. Most just dumped their combat suits and went for food in their

underwear prior to taking a shower and then finding a bed. Some fell asleep part way through their food, their heads resting on the table tops. Due to the backlog at the hospitals and the security implications, Fury's *Marauder* was brought back to the Safehouse. To complicate matters, a second *Marauder* had surrendered to Fury. The boy had been beside himself with worry about the girl whom Fury had almost killed, and he had thrown down his weapons in an instant, hoping for the chance to go with his friend. Fury had forced him to strip down to his underwear before taking him aboard *HOUND* in cuffs. The boy was kept in the holding cell in Safehouse F while his friend - apparently, she was called Charlotte Grey - was stripped of her armour and clothing before being laid on the operating table.

Taylor had had a few choice comments to make about the Duct Tape, but nonetheless, the girl received a general anaesthetic and Taylor got to work repairing the damage caused by Fury's bō-staff.

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Fury had headed for the armoury and equipment storage area to dump her kit.

The eleven-year-old girl was thoroughly exhausted, and she felt like collapsing but just as she was stumbling up the steps towards the elevator, she felt strong hands under her arms and she looked up to see her friend.

"Where you headed?" Stephanie asked. "Food? Shower? Bed?"

"I don't know," Abigail breathed, unable to make the simple decision.

Stephanie helped Abigail over to the elevator at the opposite end and they went up one level to the cabins. Stephanie laid Abigail down on a bunk and covered her with a duvet. Abigail was asleep within a second. Jamie and Danny appeared next, both very tired. Stephanie put each one to bed before they fell down. They could shower and eat later.

"Sleep tight," Stephanie whispered as she turned out the lights to their cabin.

08:05

The John Hancock Center

Hit Girl stood 343.69 metres above the city of Chicago.

In the early morning sun, she surveyed the city which stretched off into the distance. The city belonged to her, once again. It was a hard-won victory but won it had been. Beside her, Kick-Ass stood as if on guard. His presence always made her feel safe - not that Hit Girl was ever worried about her personal safety! A few feet away, Jackal stood with his arms wrapped around Shadow who stood in front of him. The four senior *Fusion* members savoured the sight of a peaceful city.

"Got a nice view up there?" Battle Guy asked.

Hit Girl chuckled as she waved at the UAV which was cruising past at the same level as they stood.

"Hi, Battle Guy - it's just perfect," Hit Girl responded.

"Enjoy the time, guys," Hal cut in.

"Oh, we will," Jackal announced.

"It's a perfect day," Shadow said as she leaned into her man and watched the UAV circle.

Shadow could not have been happier. Despite some close calls, her little family was intact. Jackal was with her and she knew that Scamp was at the Safehouse enjoying breakfast.

08:13

Out of the blue, the 12.7x55-mm STs-130VPS 76-gram bullet cut its way through the air at over three-hundred metres-per-second.

One minute, Medic was finishing off wound dressings on the corner of West Van Buren Street and South Franklin Street, the next she was lying on her back, a gaping wound in her chest. The last thing she saw was the blue sky above the city which was her home. Her last thoughts were for her family.

Then nothing.

09:05

USS CHURCHILL

New York

Captain Ryan Bennett was on the bridge of his command, having just returned from Chicago on the 6am flight that morning.

He hated having to leave his family on a pivotal night, but he had his own responsibilities. He was enjoying his new rank - he imagined that he could feel the additional weight of the silver eagles on his collar. His crew had been extremely proud to have their commanding officer promoted. He had also been assigned an additional lieutenant for his wardroom - a privilege accorded his rank.

"Captain - phone call, sir."

"Thanks, yeoman . . . Captain Bennett."

"Ryan?"

"Mindy?"

"*I have bad news for you, Ryan.*"

The also freshly promoted Executive Officer, Commander Wes Edwards, saw his commanding officer go very pale as all the blood rapidly drained from his face.

"XO, you have the bridge. I will be in my cabin and I do not wish to be disturbed for the next two hours."

"Aye, aye, sir! XO has the bridge!"

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Ryan Bennett barely made it to his cabin.

He almost slammed the cabin door in his haste as he entered before he collapsed to the deck, just as his personal cell phone rang. He pressed the button to accept the call and he raised the device to his ear.

"Daddy?"

"I'm here, honey."

"Daddy . . . Mommy's dead. . ."

"I know. . ."

Father and daughter both sobbed, despite being almost a thousand miles apart, and they mourned the loss of their loved one together.