

Sunday, October 16th, 2016

Chicago

Everything was in turmoil.

The happiness from the victory had faded almost instantly. For many, the news of the death had only reached them when they had awoken that Sunday afternoon. Jamie, Abigail, and Danny had appeared in the dining room after a luxurious shower, only to find the place full of moping individuals. They had then learned of the death of someone very important to all. Abigail had not known Cathy very long, but she had still evaporated into tears. Many of the girls bore signs of having been crying.

Chloe and Becky had been in a corner of the recreational space most of the day. Joshua appeared and disappeared as he focussed his mind on his duties. Becky was in a state, almost as bad a state as Chloe. Megan had spent a long time sitting with Chloe and Becky, even though neither were talking very much. While the tasks of cleaning weapons and combat suits would have normally been accomplished with chatter, joking, crude comments, and some decidedly immature behaviour, instead, there was professionalism - especially from the Predators - but also an underlying sadness.

There was no single person unaffected.

The following morning

Monday, October 17th

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Room 32

Stephanie had visited the previous evening, but she had not been allowed to stay long.

Saoirse was not ready for visitors, but Dr Manning knew Stephanie, and her relationship to Saoirse, so Stephanie was allowed in as 'family'. Saoirse had not regained consciousness since her accident on the Saturday. Stephanie sat beside the bed and she held onto Saoirse's intact right arm. The girl was a state. Her lower left leg was immobilised and in plaster, as was her lower left arm to the wrist. Her face was bruised, but intact - her mask and helmet had prevented anything worse. It was the crush injuries that had caused the most damage as her combat suit had prevented anything from piercing her skin.

"Please, SD, I need you."

Stephanie had tears running down her cheeks. Saoirse was her best friend and without her, Stephanie did not think that she could survive.

"Hi, Steph," a voice called from the door.

Stephanie turned to see Morgan along with her aunt and uncle - Saoirse's legal guardians. They all smiled at Stephanie, knowing how much Saoirse meant to the ten-year-old. Morgan stepped forwards and she hugged the younger girl.

"It's Saoirse; she'll pull through," Morgan whispered.

"I know - just, why Saoirse?"

"Life sucks, Steph."

"Don't I bloody know it."

Glenview

Mindy had forgotten all about it, but Dave had not.

"Happy Anniversary, honey."

"Today?" Mindy asked.

"Yes, we were married one year ago, today."

"Oh, hell; I forgot - sorry, Dave."

"We've had a lot on our minds - how about we postpone it until after the weekend, huh?"

"You sure?"

Dave grinned as his wife looked up at him with her beautiful green eyes full of worry and just begging for him to say yes. She was so adorable and totally irresistible.

"Already done. Marcus and Paige will take the kids, next week for the night."

Mindy scowled.

"I love you, so much, Dave Lizewski."

"I love me, too!"

"Ass!"

The following morning

Tuesday, October 18th

Training Facility Echo

Level 1

Lauren was dressing after having been released from the medical facility by Taylor.

Brad was 'on hand' to 'assist'.

"Brad, I can pull up my own pants, thank you," Lauren groaned.

"Just want to help."

"You didn't get enough when I was naked on Sunday?"

Brad blushed furiously.

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Next door, Shannon was the proverbial mother-hen for Marc.

The girl had been horrified when she had found out that Marc had been hurt. She had rushed up to the medical centre within minutes of her return.

"Have no fear, Shannon," Taylor had chuckled. "He's still fully functional - he just has a hole in his back."

Taylor had smiled as her daughter had blushed at the implied suggestion.

"Shannon, I'm not immobilised," Marc complained that morning.

"I don't mind helping you with certain activities," Shannon grinned.

"Playing with my dick is not a requirement, although it has its moments."

"I miss having you . . . well, you know."

"Inside you?"

"Stop it!"

"Does that turn you on - me talking about being inside of you?"

"Yes. . ."

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"Gross!" Fury commented in the next but one cubicle on hearing the conversation between Marc and Shannon.

The curtains were drawn, and the patient had not seen anybody without a mask.

"You don't have to be here, you know," Charlotte 'Charlie' Grey commented.

"Yes, I do. I feel guilty for almost killing you."

"So much for a ruthless *Predator!*"

"I only kill when I need to, and I had no need to kill you."

"Thanks for not killing me, and thanks for allowing Jake to visit."

"He your boyfriend?"

The redness on Charlie's face was enough to answer Fury's question.

"When do I get released?" Charlie asked as she rattled her left wrist which was secured to the bed by steel handcuffs.

"When we are happy that you are healing and are not about to cause any trouble."

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Marc was actually very annoyed - it was Shannon's fourteenth birthday and he had wanted to show her how much he loved her.

Instead, he was stuck in a hospital bed for a few more days. Shannon had conceded to a minor fumble where she had closed the curtains and pulled off all of her clothes before sliding into the bed with him completely naked. He might only have been able to lie leaning over to his right, but the reaction of his dick to Shannon's striptease had reassured the girl that Marc was still functional. She happily allowed herself to be fondled all over by Marc before - despite it being *her* birthday - she gave the boy a blowjob right there in the hospital.

"Honestly, the dirty bastards!" Fury had been heard to growl while Charlotte had entered into fits of giggles which had the girl crying from the pain of her wounds which were still very tender.

The yell of ecstasy from Marc on his climax also had Taylor ordering her very embarrassed daughter out of the medical centre.

"Err, Shannon - what's that stuff in your hair?" Annabelle asked her big sister a few minutes later.

Her very red-faced sister shrugged as she ran her hand through her fringe and she cringed as the hand picked up something gooey.

"Is that Marc's cum?" Megan asked as she walked past with a smirk.

"Ewww!" Annabelle growled as she ran off. "Disgusting, bitch!"

"I'd wash it out while it's fresh - much easier," Megan commented.

"Thanks," the slightly humiliated fourteen-year-old muttered.

Shannon had had a very busy morning.

Her siblings had woken her up at the crack of dawn, pleased to be able to celebrate her birthday for the first time in five years. They had each produced a gift, but Shannon's favourite was her father's present. He had remembered her comment during Jamie's birthday and he had bought her a matching pair of SIG Sauer P320 TACOPS Carry pistols with azure-blue highlights to match her combat suit. He had also thrown in a matching SIG Sauer MPX SBR rifle in the same colour scheme. All three weapons came with suppressors, spare magazines, flashlights, and laser sights.

She had almost crushed Patrick in her attempt to say thank you.

Wednesday, October 19th

Memorial Park Cemetery

As far as Mindy was concerned, it ranked among the very worst days of her life - and that was saying something.

Chloe was standing over with her father, Curtis, and Rebecca. Ryan had dashed back to Chicago the moment he had been relieved. Curtis was just numb with shock - the boy had already lost his own parents, now he had lost his aunt. As for Chloe, the sixteen-year-old girl had not smiled once since I had broken the news to her. Joshua was struggling to put a brave face on everything - at least in public. Becky was resilient, but she was simply stunned by the dramatic turn of events. Mindy stood with Dave and the kids as the family members, of which Mindy and Dave were counted as being part, gathered around the grave. There had been a large turnout to the funeral, many of those present had no idea that Doctor Catherine Bennett had died serving the city of Chicago as Medic. She was just seen as yet another victim of the battle.

Mindy hated funerals - the most recent one which she had attended had not exactly ended well - and so did Dave for the very same reason.

Glenview

The wake was at Glenview as there was the space for all.

There was food and drink for the mourners. Everybody had good things to say about Cathy. There were former colleagues from her time in the US Navy, doctors and nurses from the hospitals where she had served, and many friends. Chloe had not spoken all day and she was getting visibly annoyed by everybody's platitudes - no matter how well-meaning. Ryan chose to accept the same platitudes, steering people away from his distraught daughter. Joshua was remaining strong for Chloe and Becky. Curtis was with Megan and she growled at anybody who came close. It was during the funeral that a tall man strode up to Mindy.

"Melinda Lizewski?"

Mindy scowled - she hated any reference to what she called her 'legal' name.

"Yes."

"I am Xavier Heart. I am Catherine's lawyer, and I have a letter here which I am directed to pass to your hand should Catherine die."

The man held out a thick manila envelope which was sealed with wax. Mindy took the envelope and she was surprised to find her hands trembling.

"My condolences, Mrs Lizewski."

The man took his leave and headed over to speak with Chloe, to whom he handed a similar envelope before he moved to Joshua, then Curtis, and onto Becky. Mindy stepped outside, and she broke the seal on the envelope. Inside, she found a thick piece of paper covered with Cathy's handwriting.

Mindy began to read.

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My dearest Mindy,

If you are reading this letter, then I am dead.

I hope I died valiantly and not in some seemingly mundane way. Ever since I joined the military, I have written letters to my loved ones and then updated them over time. I stopped when I left the Navy, but I restarted again after I joined up with you other nutcases. I knew that one day, my time would be up.

I have written similar letters to Ryan, Chloe, and Curtis - also to Joshua and Rebecca. Even though you are not my own, I have always seen you as a daughter, Mindy, so you also deserve a letter.

First, business. With me gone, you are now short of somebody to provide medical support within Fusion. As such, I have a recommendation for you. Her name is Doctor Jennifer Staite, and she works at the same hospital that I did. She is young, but she is a fully qualified doctor and she has had combat experience in Afghanistan as an Air Force medic. Though she is not aware of what I used to do, she is a firm believer in what you and Fusion represent. I know that you will do your usual background checks, but I am certain that she would be very useful to you.

Enough, about that. Please take care of Chloe. She listens to you if nobody else - she has never listened to me, nor her father. You are the big sister that she never had, and you are more than a best friend to her. I know that you will also help Curtis, as you often have in the past - he sees you as the big sister he never had. I am very sorry that I will never get to see my daughter or nephew get married, nor have kids of their own - although Rebecca is very special to them both. Ryan is strong, and I know that he will get through this trying time with the support of you all.

Please stay safe, all of you. While I will miss you all, I have no desire for any of you to join me for many more years, yet.

All my love.

Cathy

October 2nd, 2016

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Mindy was sobbing long before she had made it past the first paragraph.

Later that afternoon

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Room 32

They had come straight from the funeral.

Stephanie was in a very emotional state and tears streamed down her face. Not that Morgan was much better.

"She was there for me, and I'm damn well going to be there for her."

"You've been there, Steph."

"I know. It was dark. Your mind plays tricks on you as you lay there. Being a *Predator* gives your mind so much more shit to dig up and mutilate. You feel so hopeless and you just want it to end, any which way. I want to be there to help her when she awakes."

"I know you do, Steph."

The two girls hugged as they shared their grief of losing somebody and of having someone else close to death's door.

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"What the fuck are you two blubbering about, then?"

Stephanie almost snapped her neck as she twisted around to see who had spoken. She grinned enormously as she saw Saoirse with her eyes open.

"SD!" Stephanie exploded.

"Saoirse!" Morgan threw in.

"Who died?" Saoirse asked as she saw the black dresses. "I'm not dead yet - far from it."

"Fuck!" Morgan exclaimed. "She has no idea."

Saoirse scowled.

"Who?"

Stephanie looked directly at her friend as she spoke.

"Cathy."

Saoirse struggled to find words. She just stared at the two girls, tears falling down her cheeks just as they were for Stephanie and Morgan.

"Sorry, SD - not what you were wanting to find out when you awoke."

"At least tell me some good news."

"FEAR is dead - Fortune chopped her head off. *Fusion* won the battle."

"Thank God for small mercies," Saoirse commented. "Anybody else hurt?"

"Yeah - a few; nothing bad. Marc was hurt, but Shannon was pleased to see his dick was still functional," Morgan replied with a grin. "Fury managed to save a *Marauder's* life by closing up her belly with Duct Tape."

Saoirse grinned at Stephanie who just shrugged her shoulders.

"How are you feeling, SD?" Stephanie asked.

"I'm in a lot of pain," Saoirse admitted, and Stephanie could see that her friend was holding back the tears.

Stephanie reached out and took her friend's right hand.

"Don't hold it in, SD - let it out; it helps, believe me."

Saoirse did, and Morgan felt wretched as she watched her sister suffer. She so wanted to help, but she knew that Stephanie and Saoirse had a bond which she could never have with her sister.

Summit Drive

Kelly stood at the doorway to her sisters' bedroom.

She felt alone, haunted by her actions. Her mind was in torment as it tried to come to terms with what she had done.

'It had to be done.'

'But it was your sister.'

'Katrina was beyond the point of no return.'

'You never even tried.'

'Nothing could bring her back - she was hellbent on her own destruction.'

'She did it for Mom and Dad.'

'No! That was her warped excuse. She used our parents to justify her criminal activities.'

'She loved you.'

'Maybe she did.'

'You miss her.'

"I miss her."

"You will, Kelly," Mindy offered.

The seventeen-year-old girl - she would be eighteen in two weeks - had walked around the house in silence for almost an hour. Mindy had given Kelly her space, knowing that she was struggling with all the emotions which Mindy could see passing across the girl's face. They had just returned from Joliet where Hit Girl and Fortune had assisted the local authorities with clearing the jail. Nobody was found - everybody had fled, or they had already been captured . . . or they were dead.

"The house is mine, but should I stay here?"

"That is up to you, Kelly."

"I'd be alone."

"Get somebody to move in with you - maybe Lucy, or one of the other girls. You got a boyfriend?"

Kelly's cheeks turned pink for a moment as she shook her head.

"Take your time and don't rush into any decisions, okay? Go stay at the Safehouse, or with somebody else for a few days. You're welcome at Glenview, anytime - besides, Dave might need a hand while I'm out of town."

"Thanks, Mindy."

The following afternoon

Thursday, October 20th

Blue Star Memorial Woods

Doctor Jennifer Staite was unsure of why she had agreed to the meeting.

But there she was, standing beside her car, on a chilly October afternoon. At dead on 3 P.M., a dark grey Jaguar F-Pace pulled up and parked beside her. Two people climbed out. One was a young blond-haired woman, her hair tied up in a ponytail. The man was tall and muscular with dark curly hair.

"Good afternoon, Doctor," the woman offered. "I'm Mindy Lizewski."

"Jennifer Staite."

"I'm Mindy's husband, Dave," Dave added. "You like dogs?"

"I've no problem with them."

Dave opened the rear of the luxury SUV and two large dogs jumped down.

"The larger one is Sophia - the other is Razor, Sophia is his mother."

After leashes were fitted to the two dogs, Mindy turned to the Doctor.

"Let's walk while we talk."

"I'm sorry about Cathy - she was a very dynamic woman and a good friend," Jennifer said.

"Thanks," Mindy replied. "Cathy suggested to us that you might be a suitable replacement for her."

"Replacement?"

"We need a doctor for our team. Somebody who has seen combat. Somebody who can keep their mind when all around is going to hell."

"Who are you?"

Mindy handed over a card - Dave rolled his eyes and muttered something that Mindy did not catch. Jennifer looked at the card which was purple on one side and embossed with 'HG'.

"You, are her?"

"And I, am he," Dave chuckled.

"We thank you for your assistance during the battle," Mindy said. "You saved a lot of lives, including that of Saoirse."

"I thought that girl's injuries looked familiar, but I didn't say anything."

"That is why we believe that we can trust you."

They chatted for a while longer before finding themselves back at the cars. The dogs were reluctantly loaded into the SUV and Mindy turned to Jennifer while Dave climbed into the passenger seat of the SUV.

"Do I get time to think about it?"

"Yes, Surgeon, you do."

Training Facility Echo

Level 4

The two girls were racing to the top of the climbing wall.

It was their second ascent - Abigail had won the first go.

"I still can't believe that you used my trick on that *Marauder*," Stephanie growled as she overhauled her friend.

"It worked on Electra after I slashed her, right?" Abigail responded.

"Yes, it did," Stephanie admitted. "You've spent a lot of time with that girl."

"It's my fault she was hurt so badly."

"You admitted that you had no choice."

"I know - but I've changed, Steph - I don't just hurt people for no reason."

"Me, too, but sometimes it has to be done. Considering the choice - I'm just glad it wasn't you. . ." Stephanie almost choked. "Did I just say that out loud?"

Abigail laughed, "Yes, you did - thank you, best-friend."

"It was a slip of the tongue," Stephanie growled, horrified by her admission.

"They'll be making out, next," Shannon grinned as she raced past the two youngsters.

"That would be worth watching," Marc commented from the mat below, his eyes never moving from Shannon's backside as she swung from grip to grip.

"Let's get the bitch!" Abigail growled.

Shannon screamed as she moved faster with the younger girls closing fast.

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Hailee, Morgan, and Megan stood with Marc, holding the ropes which would prevent serious injury should somebody slip.

Megan was struggling with her own emotions which were beginning to get the better of her. The events of Gotham were not easy to bury and now Megan had a major hole in her life which just added to her increasing mental instability. She knew that those she lived and worked with suspected something, but she refused to let anybody get close to her - even Curtis was kept at arm's reach. They had 'played', but not like they had before Gotham. Curtis tended to complain when Megan got too rough or she insisted on using her teeth where they did not belong.

For the first time, Megan had consented to a sixty-nine position with Curtis - something which she had wanted to try but had always felt too disgusting. To that point, only Curtis' fingers had ever explored her lower regions. Curtis had been a little surprised at the suggestion, knowing Megan's feelings concerning her 'kitty', but he had consented to Megan lying on top of him with her crotch at his mouth while she took him into hers. One benefit was that he

would slap her bottom hard should she use her teeth on him - although he got the feeling that she actually enjoyed the often-painful slap.

Curtis, currently over by the pool, watched his girlfriend as she chatted with Hailee and Morgan. He was concerned with her more recent antics both when out as Wildcat and when inside with him and naked. He knew that something had occurred in Gotham, but he had no idea exactly what, and he had no idea how to approach the subject with Megan who was getting increasingly violent at the least little thing. Megan apparently had a reserved seat outside the school principal's office and Paige was getting very annoyed with the increasingly regular post which arrived with school's postmark on it.

Curtis' time with Megan distracted him from the obvious hole left by Cathy's death. His uncle had returned from New York the very same day and he had spent time with Chloe while Curtis had felt a little left out. That was made up for when Ryan had spent the following day with the boy.

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For Shannon, the battle had been hard, but all had survived.

While she had worried about Marc, she had also worried about the rest of her family, all fighting in harm's way. Her siblings were hurt, but mainly bruises and nothing major. She had laughed when she had found the youngsters comparing bruises and counting each other's injuries to see who had the most. It was a typically *Predator* thing to do and Shannon had laughed when she had found her two siblings standing stark naked in Annabelle's bedroom counting each and every bruise which they could find on their bodies. Annabelle seemed to have none of the modesty which you might expect of a developing twelve-year-old when her ten-year-old brother was counting bruises on her body while she stood naked for all the world to see.

"Can we count yours?" they had asked, but Shannon had declined the offer.

"She's saving her body for Marc," Iain had commented slyly.

Annabelle had giggled at the suggestion as Shannon had fled. Later that evening, Annabelle had proudly declared herself as the winner with the most bruises.

"Honey," her father pointed out. "The winner would be the one with the *least* bruises."

Annabelle thought that one through for a minute before her face turned pink and she grinned sheepishly.

"Yeah - that sounds right," she muttered as Shannon burst out laughing.

"I win!" Iain declared as he smirked at his sister. "Loser!"

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For Lauren and Lizzie, things had calmed down.

Lizzie was getting annoyed with Brad fawning over her big sister, despite Lauren's injury.

"It is disgusting how much you are naked, Lauren."

"My body is my body and I will expose it to whomever I so wish."

"What?"

"If Brad wants to see my body, then he can," fourteen-year-old Lauren reiterated for her younger sister. "You have boobs too - nobody is stopping you from showing them off."

"I am not a slut!" Lizzie retorted, horrified at the very thought.

Brad stepped in between the two girls.

"Lizzie, that was uncalled for - please apologise."

"Sorry, Lauren."

"Lauren - stop being bitchy; you on your period?"

Lizzie grinned.

"Yeah - plugged herself up just this morning," Lizzie declared with a broad grin.

While Lizzie had not endured her first period, Lauren hated any reference to that hellish time of each month. Lauren blushed furiously, and she suggested that she and Brad should go for a walk.

Two days later

Saturday, October 22nd

"This really sucks!"

"We're off to sunnier shores," Sky said as she hugged Stephanie.

"You won't even notice we're gone," Chrissy pointed out as she wiped away a tear.

"True," Marc commented. "Less bitches will be better . . . ow!"

Shannon scowled as she lowered her left hand from the back of Marc's head. Sky laughed as she hugged Shannon.

"You both take care, now," Megan said.

"We'll be fine."

The hugs and goodbyes continued until it really was time for the twins and Erika to leave the city. For Marty, saying goodbye to Erika was difficult, considering their past relationship, but he had Kim to give him support.

"God, I hate all this sappy shit!" Mindy growled as she waited by the car.

"Heartless, bitch!" Dave chuckled.

He alone knew that Mindy was very sad to be splitting up the team but there were some very good reasons behind it. He would also miss Mindy as she went with the twins and Erika.

She would be needed for other reasons too.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *This storyline continues in* **CHAPTER 1: THE PALISADES** *of my new story:* **FUSION: LOS ANGELES.**

