

Author's Note: This chapter brings the story of **FORSAKEN** to ONE MILLION words!

The next morning

Sunday, November 6th, 2016

Safehouse E

Level 8 - Detention Level

It was an easy start - for those not under punishment, at any rate.

Shadow and Jackal went through the sleeping accommodation like a tornado, yanking duvets off beds.

"Get up! You have five minutes to make use of the bathrooms before you begin your day," Shadow shouted.

"Get up!" Jackal bellowed, his electronically enhanced voice striking fear into some of the younger Marauders.

Some of them had heard that very same voice in battle and they feared it. All sixteen kids scrambled for the beds and they made for the bathrooms. They were all very tired and it was Joel Burnell who noticed the time as he looked up at the large digital clock mounted high up above the communal area.

"It's five past six!" he groaned.

"Are we regretting our actions, yet?" Jackal growled and the sixteen-year-old nodded forlornly. "Let's go, people!"

Shadow led the sixteen tired youngsters back to the Training Facility.

Training Centre Echo

Level 4 - Exercise Area

While Shadow and Jackal were masked and wearing their duty uniforms, the *Marauders* were wearing just shorts, T-shirts, and running shoes. The cavernous room was cold, and the kids shivered. Their mood was sullen, and the next command did not amuse them one bit.

"They seem tired, Jackal," Shadow commented.

"Yes, Shadow, they do - maybe a wake-up swim. All of you, one width of the pool - jump in, cross, climb out - MOVE!"

The glares which the pair of senior vigilantes were very unfriendly, but neither were worried about their safety. The *Marauders* all jumped in and there were many screams as the water was cool, to say the least. Shadow and Jackal watched carefully to ensure that all sixteen crossed without difficulty, especially the youngest, Xiāngxìn. After two minutes, sixteen shivering youngsters stood soaking wet on the side of the pool.

"Two laps - MOVE!" Jackal yelled.

The kids were eager to run as the movement would warm them up very quickly. Running in wet shoes was not comfortable but the *Predators/Marauders* had endured far worse.

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Eight-hundred metres later, the panting youngsters came to a halt.

The distance was easy for them; they had been trained to run much further. They all turned as Shadow and Jackal approached them. Without a word, the kids were pushed into two groups of eight by Shadow, then she spoke.

"There are three support pillars on each side of the pool. One at a time, you will run to the first pillar and back, then the second pillar and back, then the third pillar, and back. Understand?"

There were nods all around.

"Go!" Shadow called out.

The *Marauders* sprinted the distance well - their fitness was exemplary, Shadow thought. However, the shuttle runs absorbed the last of their energy and they were all exhausted by the end. They were also very hungry.

"You've done well," Shadow said. "Now, if you all hurry and get yourselves showered and changed, you'll get a hot breakfast as a reward."

Jackal chuckled at the smiles which spread throughout the group as the kids bolted for their accommodation.

Safehouse E

Level 8 - Detention Level

The smell of the hot food was enough to speed the kids on and there were angry comments as everybody jostled for a shower.

The kids who appeared back into the communal area were clean and tidy, although their haste was obvious as some were still damp from their shower. Each was dressed in their much warmer joggers and sweatshirts plus some dry running shoes. They each grinned as they queued up at a foldup table loaded with steaming food. It was a full English breakfast with hash browns thrown in. Sarah and Shannon served each *Marauder* as they came past, giving each one a choice of what they wanted to eat from what was on offer. As the *Marauders* sat down at the long table, there were looks of surprise on their faces.

"Look, guys," Shannon explained after the last had sat down. "We're not here to hurt you. We are here to punish you for your choices. You will be rewarded for good work, but you will receive extra punishment when you fuck up. You want food like this, then you better think before you act, or you'll be getting bread and water each and every morning."

Shannon could see them all thinking about her words; even her former comrades who hated her guts.

That same time

Glenview

As was usual, the house had descended into anarchy.

"Jamie!" Dave called out as the boy bolted past in pursuit of a canine which Dave thought was Razor.

There was a loud bang as boy and canine collided with something hard, a yelp and a yell followed. Anne-Marie scrambled out of the living room to look at the carnage, followed by the ever-curious Horatio. Dave peered out of the kitchen to see Jamie and Razor getting back to their respective feet having skidded on the marble floor and then collided with the wall.

"Boys!" Anne-Marie exclaimed as the two sheepish-looking males looked at the exasperated girl.

"I wasn't part of it," Danny commented as he appeared on the scene from the stairs.

"Did we learn something from that, Jamie, Razor?" Mindy commented with a chuckle as she walked past the incident.

"Yes, Mum," Jamie grimaced as Razor whined.

That afternoon

Safehouse E

Level 8 - Detention Level

Stephanie and Lucy were back on shift.

They arrived soon after lunch to watch as the Marauders were sat down in the communal area for a lecture from two Chicago police officers. Hank Voight and Alvin Olinsky were there to ensure that each and every *Marauder* felt guilt for their actions. After a morning of heavy physical activity, the kids had been grateful for their lunch of cold sandwiches and hot soup. Hank and Alvin were highly skilled at eliciting soul-searching in those they interviewed. The group had no choice but to listen and absorb what they were being told as they had observed fourteen-year-old Lucas Charlton reduced to a sobbing wreck by Alvin without him even raising his voice in response to the boy's decision not to listen to the lecture.

Hank and Alvin both believed in second chances and they wanted the kids to have a chance at a normal life.

Training Centre Echo

Level 4 - Exercise Area

Despite the positive treatment, including demonstrating what they could receive when they cooperated, there was a growing dissent among some of the *Marauders*.

They were concerned that they were not going to survive. They were also worried about having somebody else in control of their destiny. There were six key trouble-makers who were determined to make a bid for freedom, but to do that, they would need weapons and a route to safety. They had seen what had happened when Jake had tried to use the elevator - that had been a blatant demonstration to them all. The ringleaders decided to make their play during the afternoon physical session. There, they found Psyche, Piranha, and Wildcat on duty. Ignoring Piranha, the other two girls were physically smaller which made them ideal for their plan.

Carrie Milligan and Jay Hilton made their play while the group were spread out meaning that it was more difficult for the three vigilantes to watch them all.

Level 1 - Dining Room

Mindy had just finished a late lunch and was sipping a coffee when the call came through.

"Hit Girl?"

"Hi, Hal. What's up?"

"Could you come up to the bunker, please?"

Mindy headed up one level and she checked into the Battle Bunker. She found Hal and Ember examining an image on one of the large screens.

"What's up, girls?"

Rachel was still getting used to being up close and personal with Hit Girl - somebody she feared greatly.

"Something's going down - I know it," Rachel commented.

Mindy examined the image for herself. Two of the older *Marauders* were coming close to Wildcat who had her back turned while she checked on another pair of *Marauders*. Alarm bells began to ring in Hit Girl's mind but before she could say anything Ember stabbed a radio key.

"Wildcat, right elbow, up and back . . . NOW!"

Level 4 - Exercise Area

Wildcat responded instantly, bringing her right elbow backwards.

The elbow stuck Jay in the face and he stumbled back in shock just as his hands grasped Wildcat around the neck. They both collapsed to the ground where Carrie kicked and punched the fallen vigilante, reaching for the holstered Taser. Behind them, Kieran and Dylan attacked Psyche, dragging the girl to the ground with their superior bulk and strength. Lucas made for Piranha who had her back turned while Jake did the same, running in hard and taking the veteran *Predator* off her feet. The remaining *Marauders* stood their ground and watched in astonishment as the attack unfolded. Some considered the attack and figured that they would jump aboard should it be successful while others wanted nothing to do with the bid for freedom.

The fighting did not last long as Piranha drove her fist into Jake's stomach, winding the boy. She spun around and sent Lucas flying backwards where he struck a concrete column and collapsed to the ground. Psyche flew into a wild rage, kicking and punching at the two boys who had attacked her. She found one of the boys yanked off her and she heard a yell of anger. With only a single attacker, Psyche was able to put Kieran out of his misery as she forced him to the ground and cut off his breathing until he passed out. Psyche stood up to find Kate Fincham standing over Dylan, a foot pressed to his throat. Psyche ran towards Wildcat who had kicked Carrie backwards, but the girl reengaged for a moment before she froze, as did Jay. The two teenagers had stopped dead as each of them had found death barely an inch from their jugulars. Wildcat had deployed her claws, each hand aimed upwards at the taller kids. After punching Carrie hard in the chest, Stephanie stood back and then turned on the *Marauders*. Tears were running down her red face.

"What the FUCK?" she yelled. "Why are you doing this? When it was suggested that I should help you motherfuckers, part of me said you should all fucking rot in prison for the rest of your sorry lives. Only, I got a second chance, as have other *Predators*, therefore, I said that I would do all that I could to help all of you. I even offered to help the bitch who fucking raped me!"

Stephanie glared at Willow who visibly shrank from view as many eyes looked at her - obviously, Willow had kept that little titbit from her colleagues.

"I am giving up almost all of my free time to help you lot out. I want you to get a second chance at a life. Don't you want to be free? Free to do anything

you want with your lives? Do you want to find somebody, marry, have kids? Do you want to grow old and die when you're a hundred? I want to give you that chance, as does Lucy. However, you bastards chose to become *Marauders* and there are times when I struggle to get past that single fact. What I really want to do is put a bullet into each of your bloody skulls! You have just made hell week into something which will make the *Predator Gauntlet* seem sodding tame - but you only have yourselves to blame; you sorry dumb fucks!" Stephanie finished off.

Lucy groaned.

"What's the *Predator Gauntlet*?" Wildcat asked as she saw some very miserable expressions.

"The next punishment beyond The Cage," Lucy explained. "Only three people have ever endured it - the punishment is worse than anything ever thought up by those *Urban Predator* bastards."

"Who?"

"Leo, Willow, and . . ."

"Me."

Wildcat looked up as Stormtide appeared with Hit Girl close behind.

"I went through it with Willow and Leo."

"Leo took the punishment for me," Lucy growled. "I was already in enough trouble, at the time, and he suffered - badly - but then so did Willow and Shannon."

"All of you - back to your accommodation," Hit Girl roared, and the *Marauders* not involved in the attempted breakout fled.

"Thank you, Kate - please return to your accommodation," Psyche directed the older girl who had assisted in putting Dylan down.

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The six *Marauders* were lined up, two feet apart, and forced onto their knees.

Hit Girl strode up and down before them. She was beyond angry. Psyche and Wildcat both recognised the body language and they knew that anything was possible. The six *Marauders* stared at the ground, not daring to look up into the masked face of Hit Girl. Jay Hilton was close to his seventeenth birthday and he feared that he might never actually reach that day. Carrie Milligan was not all that far behind him. Hit Girl seized them both by the necks and pulled them to their feet. She stared into their faces but neither looked at her.

"Look at me!" she growled.

Both youngsters did as they were told. Hit Girl could see real fear in their eyes as they stared at her mask despite the boy being a few inches taller than her.

"You dare to hurt my people. You dare to put my people at risk. I ought to snap your worthless necks."

Carrie was shaking with fear and she could not stop the tears which overflowed from her eyes.

"Please. . ."

"YOU DARE TO TALK TO ME?"

Carrie shook violently, and she began to sob. Hit Girl released both sixteen-year-olds and she pointed to the doorway which led to their accommodation. The two ringleaders led the way back to the accommodation.

They were escorted by Psyche, Wildcat, Piranha, Stormtide, and Hit Girl.

Safehouse E

Level 8 - Detention Level

The mood was sombre, and the other *Marauders* were all seated at the long table.

All six offenders were led in and forced to kneel before their colleagues. There was real fear felt by all sixteen *Marauders* as Hit Girl came amongst them. In her hands, she held a pair of TASER X3 devices. Without preamble, she calmly shot each of the six miscreants in the chest. She kept the triggers held down for fifteen seconds causing the six youths to writhe in agony on the floor. Then she yanked out the wires from the TASERS and left the room without a word passing the spent TASERS to Stormtide as she went.

"Such behaviour will not be tolerated," Psyche growled.

"You don't care about us," Willow commented. "We're just meat to be abused."

"We don't care, huh?" Psyche growled angrily as Surgeon entered the room.

"Surgeon will check each of them out and ensure that they are unhurt. I expected Hit Girl to use bullets - next time, she just might."

Psyche left the room, unable to face them any longer.

That evening

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Room 32

"I'm doing everything that I can, but . . . I just want to shoot the bastards and be done with them!"

Saoirse grimaced. She knew that Stephanie was not happy about dealing with the *Marauders* and Saoirse could not fault her friend there. Lucy did not appear so happy, either. She had seen many *Predators* go bad, but they had always been 'handled'. FEAR had manipulated the young minds of already damaged children and turned them into the very worst a *Predator* could become. Her first thoughts had been to kill them - she was a killer of *Predators*, after all - but that was in her past. She had to help them - somehow.

"They are nasty - some of them," Shannon commented as she sat with her friends. "I want to be hard on them, but I don't want them to resent us so much that we turn them against us. We could turn them into real *Marauders*."

"Or they could just do a Lucy: freak out and kill people," Saoirse grinned.

"Very funny, Saoirse!" Lucy growled. "Maybe that knock on the head did some more serious fucking damage."

"Am I missing something, here?" Stephanie asked, and Lucy groaned.

"You mean, you don't know about Lucy's nude week?" Saoirse chuckled.

"No," Stephanie admitted.

"I heard about it, but just not the juicy details," Shannon added, much to Lucy's annoyance.

"Up until that week, Lucy had been all but untouchable - kind of got on all our nerves," Saoirse explained. "I had been at Urban Predator for seven months and Lucy had just turned twelve a month before. She was a real bitch - worse than Mindy."

"I thought I was something real special," Lucy added.

"Not her fault," Shannon said quickly. "She was their star *Predator* and I think her status went to her head."

Lucy grimaced.

"She's not wrong," she admitted. "I had had enough. I had been there for almost two years and it was taking its toll on me and to a lesser extent, Leo."

Monday, October 31st, 2011

Colorado, USA

The day was not going well - not well, at all.

She had awoken that morning in a foul mood, and even Leo was keeping his friend at arm's length. After a fractious morning training, the girl had headed for the showers where she had found that the hot water was iffy - her mood was steadily heading downhill and building up a head of steam. The fact that two *Yellows* were stationed to observe her every move, naked or otherwise, was getting under her skin and she was not going to take anymore.

"I am so *sick* of this!" Lucy yelled as she stormed out of the shower, wrapping a towel around her body.

"You're pushing your luck, girl," Instructor Morris pointed out, stopping Lucy from moving more than six feet.

"Why are you treating me like an animal?"

"You won't do what you're fucking told - that is why we're having you watched."

"Fuck that!" Lucy yelled back. "Killing in the shower is really *passé*, but I will *not* be followed around by these yellow fucks!"

With that proclamation, she seized hold of the male *Yellow* and in a lightning move, she smashed the seven-year-old's head against the tiled wall of the showers - the boy died instantly as his skull was smashed and his brain matter scattered across the changing room tiles. The female *Yellow* was quick on the uptake and she tried to run but Lucy grabbed the youngster by her left arm which was quickly snapped at the elbow. The girl screamed out in agony as Lucy threw the luckless girl against the wall, knocking her unconscious. Without any show of emotion, Lucy picked up a fire extinguisher and she rammed it into the girl's face, smashing it. Before Lucy could do anything else, she was seized from behind by Instructor Morris and despite her violent struggling and increasingly foul language, she was quite literally dragged, kicking and screaming down several corridors and then into the gymnasium where there were two classes consisting of about twelve or so *Predators* training. All movement and sound stopped as the naked girl was thrown down onto the training mat - the towel had been lost several corridors before.

It was the very first time that any one of them had ever seen Lucy in such a subservient position of any kind. Normally, it was *they* who were naked, and *she*

who was there watching and enjoying their misery. Now, the girl who had only just turned twelve was herself completely naked and being publicly humiliated. But that did not prevent Lucy from attempting to leave the gymnasium. Only, two male instructors seized hold of the naked girl by her arms and legs, then they pinned her down on the mat, face down while Instructor Morris produced a wicked-looking leather strap and she proceeded to take that strap across Lucy's bare backside. Lucy just closed her eyes, at least initially, refusing to give in and scream out. But the abuse and the pain quickly became far too much, and she screamed out as the strap bit repeatedly into her tormented skin. She was sobbing in agony by the time the twelfth strike came down and then she was released. She lay on the mat, sobbing her heart out, but she received no sympathy whatsoever from anybody watching. Some even smiled as they saw the only Phase 2 *Predator* female disciplined before them.

Lucy felt anger. She felt humiliation. She felt hate. She blocked out the laughter and the gleeful comments as she lay huddled on the mat and her body shook with the pain and the sobbing. Then her head was pulled back by the hair and Instructor Morris glared into Lucy's tear-filled eyes.

"We will not tolerate insolence, Ford . . . as such, you will remain naked for the next week as a reminder of what you have done and of what we will not tolerate. You touch a single item of clothing and you'll receive the strap again. You will continue with your lessons and your instruction as normal." Morris laughed. "Enjoy your week."

There was some giggling from the other girls present as Lucy struggled back to her feet. She tried to maintain her dignity and poise, but walking was very painful thanks to her burning buttocks. However, it was the burning sensation of humiliation and failure, clearly evident on her face which was so much worse as she made her way out of the gymnasium and back to her room.

Along the way, the senior *Predator* received many strange looks as she passed several *Predators* and Instructors.

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It seemed to take forever to return to her room.

She ran through the recreational space and straight through into her bedroom. Leo was watching TV as he ate a sandwich and he was stunned to see the completely naked girl run past him. He dropped his plate and he ran after her. Her found his best friend lying face down on her bed, sobbing. He sat down beside her, and he cringed as he saw her badly bruised buttocks. The girl was beautiful, and Leo had seen her naked many times before, but now her perfect skin was marred by the vicious red welts from the strap.

"Luc. . ."

"I had it coming, Leo - I killed a pair of fucking *Yellows*."

"I'm with you, no matter what stupid and fucked up thing you decide to do."

Lucy turned her head to look at Leo and she forced a smile.

"Thanks."

She knew that she had no choice but to go to her next class - she groaned to herself; the class was physical training and she knew that they were going to be outside. It was instructional - she was taking the class of Phase 1 *Predators*. That bitch, Morris, she knew how to make Lucy suffer. Lucy struggled to see how she was going to live it down - a whole fucking week of remaining naked. Nobody had seen her naked in months and not since she had started

puberty. Her privacy had been a reward for her continued obedience, only she had fucked things up, rather badly.

Lucy rolled off her bed, cringing with the pain as her bottom touched the bedding.

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As Lucy pushed open the door which led out into the enclosed quadrangle, she caught sight of the twelve smirking faces standing waiting for her to arrive.

They would have all heard of Lucy's punishment and they were obviously looking forward to their lesson. Six girls and six boys. The boys were, quite naturally, staring at her naked body as she strode confidently towards them. It felt really strange walking bare foot on the warm, rough concrete and she could feel the warm sun on her bare back - at least she'd get a tan, she thought dismally.

"Before we begin," she growled as she glared at the smirking boys. "You dickless bastards get a good fucking look at my twat, then we can get on with the lesson. You want a closer look?"

Lucy ran at one of the boys, hooked a long leg around his neck, and dragged the surprised boy down to the concrete. His eyes went wide as he found his face just inches from the dark pubic hair which covered most of Lucy's labia. Lucy shoved him away and she returned to her place in front of the class. As she turned towards them, she realised that she had shown them her still very red, and very sore, backside. That Irish bitch and one of the twins were smirking.

"Abbott, Doherty - get your fucking backsides out here!"

As they approached, the two girls continued to smirk and they both made a point of staring at Lucy's exposed breasts and pubic region. Their smirks faltered slightly when Lucy just smiled at them both.

"I want you both to take your clothes off - right the fuck now!" Lucy growled.

"What?" the twin exclaimed.

"Take your fucking clothes off before I get those boys to rip them off you."

The two girls quickly pulled off their T-shirts, toed off their running shoes and pushed down their joggers and boy-shorts - neither wore a bra. They both glared at Lucy as they stood before the class, just as naked as Lucy was before the other kids.

"Get back in line, bitches!" Lucy growled and both chastened girls abandoned their meagre piles of clothing and they reluctantly returned to their places.

The boys appeared much happier now that there were *three* naked girls in the class.

"Space out, all of you - two lines; boys facing girls." Once the kids had sorted themselves out, she gave her next order. "Let's see twenty jumping-jacks."

Ten-year-old Doherty and eleven-year-old Abbott shot nasty glances at the smirking Lucy as they began their exercises before the drooling boys.

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All through dinner that evening, eyes were on Lucy's naked body as she ate.

Leo kept talking to her, in a vain attempt to keep her mind off the muttering, the smirking, and the giggling. From his point of view, he had no problem

staring at Lucy's breasts which had pretty much grown from nothing in the preceding twenty months or so that they had been together. They were not big, but there was enough there to show that Lucy was becoming a young woman and he secretly thought that her cherry-red nipples looked cute.

"Stop looking at my nipples - I know you like them," Lucy grinned.

"Where did you get that idea?"

"You told me, back when I first started getting breasts - you said that my nipples looked awesome the way they stuck out. I only got a bra to shut you up."

"You have an awesome body - you should be proud of it. Who gives a fuck what those bastards think? You are the most beautiful girl here."

Lucy blushed wildly, but for a good reason, and she felt the blush go almost as far down as her breasts.

"I just hate all the boys staring at my fucking twat all the time. It's covered in hair for fuck's sake; there's *nothing* to fucking see!"

Leo had other ideas on that and the raging erection in his trousers reminded him that she was gorgeous. Not a single boy in the place had yet reached puberty, so it was only the girls who exhibited any pubic hair and Lucy herself had started growing hair and developing breasts a few weeks before the arrival of the First Intake, none of whom had reached puberty at the time of their arrival. Most of the time, the two sexes showered separately, but at times, either for expediency's sake or just because the instructors were in a particularly vindictive mood, both sexes were forced to shower together. That allowed the boys to keep an eye on the girls as they had each begun puberty, much to the girls' annoyance as the boys were very quick to comment on those girls without any outward sign of development.

Lucy was very happy to return to the privacy of her room and away from the prying eyes of the other *Predators*.

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Leo was in heaven.

While neither of them had ever been shy about nudity, they didn't exactly go out of their way to wander around nude. Lucy remained covered up as a rule and Leo enjoyed the odd view of her naked. So, for the twelve-year-old boy to have a naked girl sitting beside him while they watched TV together was slightly off-putting. He had also noticed that Lucy was distinctly uncomfortable, even when alone with him.

"You're enjoying this, aren't you?" Lucy growled.

"Who wouldn't, Luc."

"I don't mind you looking, Leo."

"I know."

"Thanks for being with me."

"Always, Lucy - I will always be there for you."

"As I will be for you."

Northwestern Memorial Hospital, Chicago
Room 32

"That was nasty - even by my standards," Stephanie offered.

"Thanks, Steph," Lucy acknowledged. "I know what you went through; I've been briefed." Lucy laughed. "Those bastards wanted rapid bitches, but they hated it when those same rabid bitches periodically turned on them."

Stephanie grinned, and Saoirse chuckled. Shannon scowled.

"Cheer up, Shan," Saoirse said. "I know you hate talking about the past, but it happened, honey."

Shannon closed her eyes, visualising the degrading treatment she had suffered from minute one, all the way through to the day when *Fusion* had found her and returned her to her family. She had suffered just as badly as the others, although she saw a lot of her degrading treatment as worse than what the others had endured. She hated rehashing the past and hearing about the worst of what *Urban Predator* had represented.

"I know. Without you and Lucy, I would not have survived, and I would have probably topped myself. Even little Jamie kept me looking ahead instead of behind. I owe all of you for my life and for the continued support that you give me. You've all suffered in so many horrible ways but you all stay sane. . ."

Stephanie laughed insanely.

"Well, as close to sane as is humanly possible," Shannon grimaced as she looked over at the little short-haired blonde girl with the insane grin on her face.

Stephanie was a miracle. Shannon had heard almost every story there was about the brave little ten-year-old and her own suffering was nothing compared to what Stephanie had endured. Somehow, that girl kept suffering and enduring, but she continued on and on. They all ultimately owed Stephanie their lives - every damn *Predator* and every damn *Marauder*. Without Stephanie falling into the hands of Hit Girl and her vigilantes, *Urban Predator* might never have folded, and she might never have found her family.

"Cheer up, Shannon," Stephanie offered as she put an arm around the older girl's shoulder. "It will get better - slowly."

"Thanks, Steph."

Lucy spoke up, uneasily.

"I've never spoken to anybody about my missions for the CIA . . . but . . . I think I have to come clean about a couple of things. When Stephanie turned on the CIA, they were more than a little bit pissed about their super-*Predator* going bad on them. They activated one of their best operatives - Foxtail. Only Foxy was not good enough. . ."

"Don't call me that!" Saoirse complained from the bed.

Lucy grinned fiendishly.

"As I was saying, *Foxy* was not good enough and she fucked up three times - okay, it wasn't like she lacked skills; I taught the bitch . . . only, Stephanie is one of the best *Urban Predator* ever turned out - and I should know; I *am* the best *Urban Predator* ever turned out. In fact, after Foxtail failed to terminate the young Stephanie Walker AKA *Psyche*, the best was sent to terminate Saoirse Doherty AKA *Foxtail*."

Saoirse winced.

Wednesday, February 10th, 2016

Colorado, USA

"Yes?"

The man looked up at the insolent expression on Lucy's face. He was used to the moody teenager - she was sixteen-years-old, but she might as well have been twenty-one for all the respect he got from the girl. She always went out of her way to figuratively stick her middle finger up at the instructors, *Urban Predator*, and the CIA, whenever possible. The insolent teenager did not wait to be asked, but instead, she sat down in a chair on the other side of the desk and got herself comfortable.

"Comfy, Lucy?"

"Yeah . . . I think so."

"We're having a problem with a *Predator*. . ."

"Another one?" Lucy asked sarcastically, rolling her eyes.

"Less of the attitude, Lucy!"

"Yes, *sir*!"

Two days later

Friday, February 12th

Chicago, USA

The mission had two potential targets.

Target number one had been a surprise while the second one had not. She had not received a go order, yet, so the girl was still alive. Lucy had selected a perfect location from where to take the girl down, should she not carry out her mission satisfactorily.

As Lucy watched, she saw a short person appear. The female was wearing some sort of outlandish vigilante outfit. Lucy's target approached.

"Well, well, I never thought it might come to this. . ." Lucy mused as she studied her target through the high-powered sniper scope. "Goodbye, you fucking Irish slut."

Then, just as Lucy was squeezing the trigger, Foxtail fired off three bullets into the masked vigilante who went down like a sack of potatoes. Lucy paused while Foxtail moved over to the dead vigilante and . . . holy shit! The dead vigilante shot Foxtail, three times in the chest - Foxtail, who was obviously wearing body armour, fell onto her back before struggling back to her feet. Then a man appeared out of nowhere and he choked Saoirse into unconsciousness.

Lucy sat back, away from the sniper rifle - what the *fuck* was going on!

The early hours of Saturday morning

1714 West Grace Street

Lucy made an easy entry into the apartment.

When the CIA got pissed at you, then you had a very nasty future ahead. In the case of one Saoirse Doherty AKA Foxtail, her life was about to be destroyed completely. The apartment was smart and cosy - shame really, but it had to go. An example had to be set, and Foxtail had to suffer. After a brief tour around the apartment, Lucy placed half-a-dozen sealed glass jars in strategic locations with at least one jar in each room. In the bedroom, the jar sat on the bed. In the living room, the jar sat on the couch. Each jar was filled with a potent highly-flammable mixture of liquid and various other chemicals. It was a concoction of Lucy's own making - chemistry was a staple part of *Predator* training and every *Predator* by Phase 3 could make simple explosive and incendiary devices from just about anything they could find. Each jar was also fitted with a small remote detonator attached to the glass which when triggered would shatter the glass and ignite the liquid. With a quick check around the apartment, Lucy left, and she returned to her motorcycle. Once she was ready to leave, she pulled out a small black detonator and she flipped up a switch before stabbing a red button.

In the apartment, six glass jars shattered, and liquid flooded out, igniting and six independent conflagrations began, swiftly spreading across the apartment.

Sunday, November 6th, 2016

***Northwestern Memorial Hospital, Chicago
Room 32***

"You, torched my place?"

"Sorry, Saoirse - but you know how it works."

"I do. Thanks for telling me."

"You're my friend - not my enemy."

"You're our friend, too, Lucy - always remember that."

Five days later

Friday, November 11th

Fielding Drive

"What's up with Dad?" Becky asked Chloe.

"Three years ago, Josh's Dad was killed, and Josh ended up in a coma. That was the start of me travelling down the road to becoming Shadow. I thought I'd lost my soulmate - only, I found him again when Mindy almost cut his head off for breaking into one of her Safehouses."

Becky walked over to where Joshua was sitting on a chair at the table, nursing a mug of tea. Becky wormed her way onto his lap and she wrapped her arms around him. Joshua smiled, and he reciprocated, hugging the diminutive little girl.

"I'm sorry to hear about your Dad," Becky whispered.

"Thanks, sweet pea."

Chloe smiled as she watched Joshua and Becky hugging. The two had become very close of late and for Chloe, it was lovely to see them both together. They were her life - her entire life. Since the death of her mother, Chloe gave all her attentions to her family. Becky helped her sanity and Joshua kept her focussed.

Together, they were getting through their collective loss. Joshua was so happy to have a mother figure in his life and he loved Cathy. For him to lose that mother figure had struck him hard. Many a night had passed with all three sharing the same bed. Each of them was suffering and they each needed one another. Joshua and Becky were inseparable - something which irked Chloe at times as they would often be laughing about something and then go quiet the moment she walked into the room. She figured that they were doing it on purpose, but she tolerated it.

"You okay, honey?" Chloe asked Joshua.

"I have you two, so I'm fine; I have my girls," Joshua replied as he hugged them both.

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There was a knock on the door.

Becky squirmed out of Joshua's arms and the little girl scampered to answer it.

"Mindy!"

"Hi, Becky!"

"You come to see Mum and Dad?"

"Yes, Becky."

"Mum said you tried to cut Dad's head off, in New York."

Mindy glared at Chloe for a moment before scowling.

"You're never gonna let that one go, are you?"

"Not a chance!" Chloe grinned as Joshua rolled his eyes.