

The following morning
Monday, August 22nd, 2016

London

They sped through the early morning rush-hour.

Jamie was *not* convinced that it was a safe method of transport, but he was also fully aware that he had no choice. He also had to admit that the thirteen-year-old girl whose waist he had his arms wrapped around was actually a skilled rider - well, they hadn't hit anything . . . yet! The KTM 690 Duke R was an awesome machine and powerful. There had been a selection of motorcycle helmets in the garage and they had each found one that had fitted.

"Oh, get a fucking grip, boy!" Shannon had laughed when she had seen his expression as she had swung a long leg over the orange and black machine.

They were both armed and they had crammed clothing and other supplies into the twin panniers either side of the machine.

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The A40 was busy - as it was most mornings. They generally headed in a westerly direction, obeying every traffic law and speed limit - it would not do for the police to find the motorcycle in the hands of a thirteen-year-old and an eight-year-old. The ride was to be long - three hours and a little over 125-miles. They would stop more than once to rest. While Shannon was an accomplished rider - and Jamie to some extent - she was not used to long rides. They stopped at the Fleet services on the M3 about an hour and forty minutes into the journey.

"Err Shan?"

"Jamie."

"Did you steal this motorcycle?"

"I bought it yesterday," Shannon laughed. "It's perfectly legal and untraceable. I paid cash, dweeb!"

"What if we. . .?"

"Oh, for fuck's sake, Jamie!"

Shannon reached into one of the panniers and she produced a yellow number plate - she peeled off two sticky pads on the back of the plate and she slapped it on top of the existing one.

"Happy?"

Jamie smiled.

"You always have everything covered, Shan."

"I do what I can. Let's get on - we have many more miles ahead of us."

"Great - enjoying every minute of it," Jamie grumbled as he climbed up behind Shannon and wrapped his arms around her waist.

"Hold on tight, Jamie boy!"

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The rest of the trip was relatively easy and they finally found themselves seated in a small coffee shop located towards the centre of the medieval cathedral city of Salisbury in the county of Wiltshire. After a sandwich, each and some Coke, they both went for a walk to stretch their legs. They walked around the old sections of the city, near to the cathedral, enjoying the seasonally warm weather. It was also a good opportunity to identify if anybody had followed them.

Both *Predators* were skilled at counter-surveillance but neither were able to identify a single tail. After a visit to a Sainsbury's supermarket to acquire some fresh supplies, they remounted their KTM motorcycle and headed south-west on the A354. The ride was fairly easy and lasted about forty minutes. They were able to zip past any slow or stationary traffic while being very careful not to attract too much attention to the youngsters.

"Where are we?" Jamie inquired as he removed his helmet.

"Badbury Rings."

"That tells me nothing - it just looks like a sequence of grassy mounds."

"That's exactly what it is. It's an Iron Age hill fort whose location for some reason features more than once in my research on Scorpio Enterprises. They gotta have something around here. . ."

"You want me to climb that?" Jamie asked dejectedly as he looked up at the highest part of the mound.

"We need to get a look at the surrounding area and what better way than from the top of a 'grassy mound'?"

"Can't argue with that logic," Jamie growled forlornly and he started walking.

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Two hours later, Jamie was getting annoyed with his companion. Shannon had scanned most of the surrounding area with a pair of large binoculars which he had lugged up the hills - yes, multiple hills - the fort was made up of several earthen barriers each of which had had to be climbed. Shannon would dart from one point to another checking out the horizon and then everything between the horizon and themselves - a timely endeavour. Then things went sour.

"We're being watched, Stormy," Jamie hissed.

"Huh?"

"Three men and a woman."

"You certain."

"I'd bet your pubes on it."

"Funny little shit! Explain."

"They're spacing themselves to cover any immediate escape route. I saw the muzzle of a pistol sticking out from beneath the woman's jacket. They're not behaving like tourists, neither."

"Well reasoned, Jamie. I agree with you but right now, we are over six-hundred yards from our ride. Almost seven-hundred if we have to go around the fort."

"Okay - we kill them," Jamie suggested.

"In broad daylight before a hundred witnesses?"

"The same might apply to them," Jamie offered hopefully.

"Yeah - let's try it; we split up and meet back at the ride, 'kay?"

"See ya, Stormy!"

Both kids were on the north-east side of the fort, so they could only go north and south. Shannon headed south, taking the longest route - she had the longer legs and she could run the fastest, leaving Jamie to take the shorter northern route.

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Jamie ran along the earthen defences before throwing himself down the bank and then running up the other side. His rapid movements had momentarily come as a surprise to the watchers; as had Shannon's. Two of the men went after the girl while the other man and the woman went after Jamie. The boy never stopped - he just ran and ran, dodging tourists and trying not to draw too much attention to himself; not all that hard as a running boy wasn't really out of the ordinary. His pursuers were obviously trying to keep a low profile or they would have taken him out hard - with a pistol. But not too low a profile; as he ran he was taken down by the woman who had leapt at him and knocked him down into the grass between two earthen berms.

Jamie responded by kicking the bitch in her mouth. She yelled out in pain with blood spilling from her smashed nose and torn lips. Jamie was able to scramble away from her but before the boy could regain his feet, her partner seized hold of his arm. The man received an elbow in his gut followed by a punch to his face and another to his chest. Jamie then kicked him hard between the legs. The vicious attack, over only a few seconds, incapacitated the man.

Jamie ran on, heading towards the motorcycle and, he hoped, safety.

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Shannon had heard yelling from the other side of the fort - adult yells. Unfortunately, she had no time to worry about Jamie - she had her own problems. Two men were getting very close, despite her long legs and the fact that she was sprinting faster than she could remember. As she came around the south end of the fort, she was forced to the ground as one of the men dived at her. They both rolled into a ditch and Shannon received a sharp punch to her side. She screamed out in pain and kicked the man as hard as she could in his stomach. He seized her foot and pulled her towards him. Shannon was having none of it; she fought hard to make him lose his grip which he did but then she fell into the hands of the other man who had a pistol out. Shannon dove at him and she twisted the pistol toward the man's left thigh and then pulled the trigger.

The pistol was suppressed but the man's scream of pain was not. Shannon shoved him away and ran hard. As she reached the base of the fort, she smiled with relief as she saw Jamie running flat out on an intercept course. Not too far behind him, she could see two people running - one of whom, Shannon noticed with a smirk, was a woman and she had a bloody face.

As usual, Jamie was giving as good as he got!

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Shannon was shaking by the time she skidded to a halt on the loose gravel beside the motorcycle. Sweat was dripping off her as she passed Jamie his helmet and she pulled her own down over her sweat-soaked hair. Within another minute, they were racing off down the track towards the main road. They heard the sharp wheel-spin of a vehicle accelerating after them, the engine revving hard. Shannon took a left at the main road and she raced down the road as fast as she dared.

Four miles later, Shannon slowed the motorcycle as they entered the very narrow streets of Wimborne Minster. After riding round the streets for almost twenty minutes checking for a tail, Jamie nudged Shannon and pointed at a row of parked motorcycles. She parked the KTM and with a black marker pen, she altered the registration plate from **FG16 FDL** to **EG16 EBE**. It wasn't perfect, but it would be good enough when viewed from a short distance away. They both ran off, together, into the market town and then into a busy supermarket.

There, they sought out a cold drink and some food at the café.

The following morning
Tuesday, August 23rd

Wimborne, Dorset

"This has to be one of the worst damn ideas that you've ever had, Stormy!" Jamie moaned.

The disgruntled boy was sitting up in his sleeping bag and he glared down at his companion who lay beside him.

"Stop your moaning, Jamie boy - we needed somewhere safe to sleep; you know that those bastards would be checking out hotels and we don't really need a repeat of Whitby," Shannon pointed out.

"This tent stinks," Jamie complained.

"Yes, we both need a shower or even a bath," Shannon confirmed as she sat up, wriggling out of her own sleeping bag.

"I need to wee," Jamie complained as he scrambled out of his sleeping bag and unzipped the inner and outer door panels of the tent.

The little campsite was very busy for the time of year with many tents, caravans, and kids running around all over the place. To be honest, Jamie blended in with all the other eight-year-old boys running around and he joined several other boys in the toilets at the urinals. By the time he had finished, washed his hands and face, and then headed back towards the tent, he passed Shannon who was on her way to the toilet block.

"I'll start getting breakfast ready," Jamie called as they passed.

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By the time Shannon returned to the tent, Jamie was messing about with a small camping stove upon which sat a kettle which was bubbling merrily and steam was hissing out of the spout. Two plastic cups were sitting in the grass, each with a teabag in situ. As Shannon sat down, Jamie very carefully poured the hot water into the two cups. Once done, he replaced the kettle and handed a cup to Shannon.

"Where's the milk?" she asked.

"Sorry - I spilt it."

"All of it?"

"Yeah."

"I hate tea without milk!" Shannon grouched as she sipped at the hot liquid.

"How about we go find some bacon sandwiches?" Jamie suggested.

"I *am* hungry . . . plus this tea sucks!"

Jamie scowled.

"I'm sorry, Jamie; you've still got a lot to learn."

"You're stormy today, Stormtide - talk about a storm in a teacup!"

Stormtide growled as she poured away her tea.

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After a large breakfast at a small café in the town, the two runaway *Predators* packed up their gear and stowed it all in and on the motorcycle. They headed south, not wanting to re-enter the hornet's nest immediately. Scorpio was not going anywhere and the two youngsters had had enough fun for that week. After an hour's ride, they paused at Poole Quay, in the coastal town and seaport of Poole.

"I would love to have one of those, one day," Jamie commented as he stared with barely concealed envy across the narrow stretch of water at the ultra-decadent, world-leading yacht designer and manufacturer: Sunseeker International.

Moored alongside their place of birth were half a dozen, state of the art, sleek as hell, luxury yachts.

"They are beautiful, Jamie. You get one of them and I might just come aboard and set sail with you."

"Fat chance!" Jamie replied. "I'll never see inside a luxury yacht as long as I live."

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Twenty minutes later, after having cruised past Poole Park, they stopped at the junction of Whitecliff Road and Sandbanks Road.

"We have a problem," Jamie hissed over the intercom in their helmets.

"Huh?"

"Check your mirrors."

"Oh, crap!" Shannon commented when she checked her mirrors as Jamie had directed and there, about twenty yards behind, was a marked police motorcycle - a powerful BMW. "Just pretend we ain't seen him."

Shannon indicated and turned right onto Sandbanks Road keeping below the speed limit.

"Stay under thirty," Jamie suggested.

"I am."

The police motorcycle was still there, twenty yards behind. Shannon felt very uneasy and that feeling just turned into alarm as the blue lights on the motorcycle began strobing and the siren sounded twice. The police officer pointed directly at Shannon as she looked behind her and he pointed her to the side of the road.

"You'd better pull over," Jamie suggested.

"Like hell!"

"Why not?"

"Is he a real policeman? You see Terminator 2?"

"Stormy - you on your period, again?"

"Fuck this!" Shannon growled as she opened up the KTM's 690cc engine.

The police BMW was only feet behind, siren wailing, as they hurtled down Sandbanks Road which quickly turned into Shore Road. Neither *Predator* had the remotest aspiration of actually outrunning the performance motorcycle which cruised a few feet behind them but they were going to damn well try. They overtook several cars as they went, often riding on completely the wrong side of the road. The only time they pulled away from the pursuing police officer was when he slowed for the safety of other road users but he quickly regained his position a few feet off their rear wheel.

"Well, he keeps up with us like a real policeman," Jamie pointed out.

"You want me to shove a tampon in your gob?" Shannon shot back. "I'll make it a used one if you'd like. . ."

The road curved around before passing through a very expensive neighbourhood where only multi-millionaires and billionaires lived. Along the way, the single motorcycle has been joined by a police car. Ahead of them, they discovered a very long queue of cars stretching off in front of them. Shannon manoeuvred past, ignoring the irate beeps of the waiting drivers. A car almost cut Shannon up but they skirted past with barely an inch to spare - the policeman was not as lucky as he was forced to brake heavily. A minute later, Shannon grinned as she saw the queue begin to dissipate ahead but then the road curved to the left and . . .

"Holy, shit!" Shannon yelled as she slammed on the brakes and the KTM slewed to a halt.

"What the fuck, are you stopping for?" Jamie demanded.

"Because there's no more fucking road!" Shannon swore.

Jamie looked ahead and he saw that Shannon was indeed correct; the road stopped at a slipway which vanished into Poole Harbour. The ferry was loaded with vehicles and was just about to leave; the ramp was raising up off the slipway. Shannon spun the rear wheel and made for the ramp passing aboard and then through the gates which were just being closed by an attendant.

"Crazy bastards!" the attendant yelled at them as he shook his head.

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The ride across took four minutes, during which time the police motorcyclist appeared on the slipway which they had just left. Shannon had not wanted to cross the ferry but there had been no realistic choice. The chains which the ferry used to propel itself clanked noisily but the crossing was smooth and Jamie thought it was brilliant. Once across, they awaited their turn to disembark before

paying the toll - £1 - and then heading south, passing through the village of Studland and then picking up the road to Swanage.

The seaside town of Swanage was full of tourists and they blended in well. They found a suitable place to park the KTM and Shannon swiftly switched the number plate. They then removed their leathers and in just shorts and T-shirts, they headed into the town with Shannon carrying a backpack over her shoulder. Their first stop was the beach where Jamie pulled off his T-shirt, kicked off his boots, and ran into the water. Shannon did the same and joined her companion splashing around in the cool waters.

Jamie enjoyed play fighting with Shannon as he took her feet out from under her and she fell under a large wave before coming back up coughing, spluttering, and muttering obscenities between splutters. The dip in the sea served as a makeshift bath as well as a chance to observe their surroundings and check for any followers. The police would have no idea who they were, so they were safe behaving like two youngsters enjoying their time on a sandy beach and splashing in the cool sea. They stayed there for almost an hour of splashing, shouting, and generally behaving like young kids - for the first time in a very long time.

As they both staggered from the water, they found their backpack and Shannon pulled out two large towels which she laid out on the sand. Both laid down and enjoyed the warm sun on their bodies. Jamie reached over with his left hand and he gripped Shannon's right, squeezing tightly. Shannon squeezed back, enjoying the sun that dried her skin and her clothing. It was the first time in days that they had been able to unwind - even slightly. The narrow escape the previous afternoon had been a shock to the system - even if it had not exactly been unexpected!

Lunch was a massive portion of fish and chips each - the cod was particularly good.

***Early the following morning
Wednesday, August 24th***

Swanage, Dorset

Not surprisingly, they had both been very tired that evening after they had pitched the tent in a secluded corner of a nondescript camp site.

They had had a busy day just being kids. After their lunch, they had feasted on ice cream and almost made themselves feel sick. They had purposely kept away from the motorcycle and remained on foot. They had seen several police vehicles around during the day but the police were operating blind, looking for two short people in motorcycle leathers. After cleaning their pistols, they had fallen asleep after a supper of pork pies and sausage rolls, washed down with Coke.

Jamie awoke just as dawn's early light began to filter into the tent. He checked his watch - it was a little after five in the morning - and then he looked over to check on Shannon. Only, Shannon's sleeping bag was empty. Jamie sat up and he could hear a scuffling from behind the tent. He dug his hand under his sleeping bag and pulled out his pistol as he scrambled for the doorway which was unzipped. Carefully, Jamie stepped outside, cringing as his bare feet touched the damp, cold grass. He moved towards the scuffling sound which had turned into a different sound and he triggered the flashlight located beneath the pistol's barrel.

"Fuck off, Jamie!" Shannon growled.

Jamie did so, his mind reeling at what he had seen. Shannon was naked from the waist down and peeing into the grass.

"Sorry, Shan - I didn't know it was you."

Shannon wiped herself with some toilet paper and then quickly pulled up her knickers.

"I had to go and the toilet block was too far!" Shannon explained as they regained their sleeping bags.

"That was a little more than I had expected to be seeing - reminded me not to go behind the tent in the morning," Jamie suggested.

"Oh, ha, fucking ha!"

Jamie returned the pistol from whence it had come and he lay back down again and closed his eyes - he was tired and he could do without Shannon pissing away his sleep.

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That afternoon, they packed up and left Swanage behind. There was work to be done and Scorpio would not fall on its own - unfortunately! The ferry via Sandbanks was probably a no-go zone, so they opted to take the long way around via Corfe Castle and Wareham. It was a scenic route and again, Shannon was able to zip in and out of the traffic as they curved around Poole Harbour. At Lytchett Minster, they picked up the A35 dual-carriageway which would take them back towards Poole where they by-passed the centre and made for the adjoining seaside town of Bournemouth. As they picked up the Wessex Way, heading east, Jamie nudged Shannon.

"Shan - I hate to say this, but what would you think if there just happened to be three guys behind us, all dressed in black, and all riding black motorcycles?"

"Then we might have a problem," Shannon replied as she checked her mirrors closely.

"Would that problem grow if there was also a pair of black Ford Mondeos, too?"

"Jamie, are you shitting me?"

"I wish I was, Stormy."

"Maybe they're not after us," Shannon suggested.

As Shannon passed around the Bournemouth West Roundabout, taking the first exit, she felt a chill which went from the top of her back, all the way to the bottom. Then, as she glanced into her right-hand rear view mirror, she caught a flash and then she heard the bullet whiz past her head.

"Stormy - they're shooting at us," Jamie offered unnecessarily.

"Tell me something, I don't know!"

"Nothing comes to mind - just fucking step on it!"

They had no idea that they were heading directly for the very centre of Scorpio's very large web.