

October 30th, 2013

An unknown location in the USA

I made a kind of friend towards the end of my fourth week of being alone.

She was on punishment and I had been given the job of bringing her food and water. Her name was Rachel and she was eleven. She was the first girl that I had seen naked with hair 'down there'. As with all kids on punishment she was kept naked. On that morning, the girl had been dragged into a punishment cage. I had been summoned from my own, slightly more comfortable cage, and then she had been forced to strip before me and hand me each item of her clothing as she did. The girl had obviously been angry at her fate and more than a little embarrassed at being forced to strip in front of a young boy who could not help but star at what she revealed. However, I got the distinct impression that she was used to it as she made no real attempt to cover up her bits.

She was kept in her cage for three straight days with only bread and water which I brought to her twice a day. She was not allowed out of the cage, nor was she allowed to empty her bucket – it stank after the first day which just added to her humiliation. As a 'supernumerary', I was the only person that she was permitted to talk to – mind you everybody else would just ignore her, if they saw her, but not many people came to the punishment wing; not if they had any sense. She ignored me for the first few hours but then, when I had brought the girl her food for the second time, we exchanged greetings and we then talked about stuff.

It was a bit weird, me being clothed and her being naked, but Rachel didn't seem all that bothered.

The Present

Thursday, June 2nd, 2016

Leeds, United Kingdom

Over the previous week or so, I had tried in vain to recover the other packs of equipment but the police had kept the place well secured.

So, just over a week after my explosive escape, I returned to scout things out in daylight – nothing unusual about a kid being nosy, I thought. I spied four men talking beside a Ford Mondeo and a very nice Overfinch Range Rover. My mind said 'five' – as in they worked for MI5, The Security Service. The four men walked into the Safehouse and were gone for several minutes before they returned to the street. The thinner, geekier one; he looked a little pale. I laughed at that. Then I flinched as the younger of the other three men spied me and he stared in my direction.

I saw his expression change to one of realisation; I was busted.

I fled the scene, and fast.

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Rachel was a Phase 2 *Predator*.

She had been in the system for a little over three years. I asked her about what she had been taught in that time. Initially, Rachel had been reluctant, but she soon gave in just to alleviate her boredom. She explained about learning new skills. She talked about Martial Arts training, weapons training, and some other cool sounding stuff. As Rachel opened up, she began to explain how to take apart a SIG Sauer pistol. It kept her mind off her degrading situation and I gulped down the information.

Then it all came to an end.

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At the end of the third day, I was ordered to escort Rachel to the showers – kids under punishment were not allowed to go anywhere unescorted, mainly for their protection. I had no idea what a six-year-old boy could do to protect her, but rules were rules even if they seemed strange.

As was usual for those leaving the punishment cages, she carried with her the stinking bucket. I had no idea what Rachel had done to incur the wrath of the instructors, and Rachel had not been forthcoming, but when we arrived in the showers she was ordered to go and stand in the centre of the shower area, close her eyes, and not to move. Then I was shocked as a woman stepped forwards and picked up the bucket of piss and poo. She upended the bucket over the girl's head. Rachel screamed as her own bodily waste was poured onto the fiery red hair on her head and then continued on down her body. I turned away but I could still hear her sobbing and gagging at the stench.

"You knew the rules, Ascot, and you broke them," the woman growled. "Let this be a lesson to you." Then the woman turned to me. "Get her cleaned up, kid."

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The next few days passed with the usual chores and I did not see Rachel again after I had helped her wash that day. She had been sobbing uncontrollably and it had taken quite a while to calm her down and then to wash the 'stuff' out of her hair. Then, out of the blue, one of the other supernumeraries stopped me in the corridor.

"The Doctor wants to see you."

I had no choice but to go see the Doctor. I hated the man. He had been there when I had been separated from my sister. I stopped outside his office and knocked on the door.

"Enter!"

I pushed open the door and walked straight to his desk and stopped.

"James Reeman reporting, sir!"

"Thank you, Jamie."

It was only then that I noticed we were not alone. Standing against the wall was the Phase 2 girl, Rachel Ascot – fully clothed. She showed no sign of recognition – she was way above me in the pecking order, so I was used to it. Those on punishment were generally regarded as lower than 'supernumeraries', but only for the duration of their punishment.

"I have been having a chat with young Miss Ascot, here – she has told me some things about you, Jamie. I think we need to have a chat about your future here."

The Present

Saturday, 4th June, 2016

Highroyds, Safehouse H

I had put up with many cold nights since I had been forced out of the CIA Safehouse.

Being underground, I had no heating, not even from sunlight. I also needed a shower – I had not had one in over a week and I reeked. I had not ventured outside in two days and I was feeling very despondent about my future.

I lay back on my folded sleeping bag and tried to collect my thoughts.

October 30th, 2013

An unknown location in the USA

The Doctor reached into his desk drawer and his hand came out holding a pistol.

I flinched as the Doctor handed it to me. Following carefully what I had been taught by Rachel, I checked that the weapon was clear before I looked up at the Doctor. I was confused.

“Take it down.”

I looked over at Rachel, who for the first time smiled at me and she nodded slightly. I followed the instruction and within a few minutes, I had followed the remembered steps and the weapon was arranged neatly on the Doctor’s desk.

“Reverse it.”

Again, I ran through the steps taught to me by Rachel and I placed the reassembled and safed pistol back onto the desk.

“Check it, please, Miss Ascot.”

Rachel stepped forwards and did so. She smiled as she returned the pistol to the Doctor.

“Well done, Jamie. Well done, Rachel.”

I was still confused and my expression must have betrayed me.

“Jamie. While you are still much too young to be a Phase 1 *Predator*, Miss Ascot has agreed with a proposition of mine to reduce her sentence. She will spend her free time training you to the standards required to be a Phase 1 *Predator*. I’ll make it simple: you fail, Jamie, she fails. I’ll leave it to Miss Ascot to explain what failure means.

“Both of you seemed to ‘click’ while Miss Ascot was being punished. I watched the recordings and listened to your conversations. Miss Ascot is a very good instructor and you seem to have remembered everything she said, despite her breaking the rules and telling you things that you should not have known. However, she must have seen something in you. Miss Ascot, if you please.”

Rachel stepped forwards and she turned to me.

“Take off your top and trousers,” she ordered.

I did not hesitate and shed them. She handed me a fresh, clean t-shirt and joggers. Instead of the yellow t-shirt and yellow joggers which marked me out to all as a nobody, they were the dark grey of a *Predator*.

The Present

Saturday, 4th June, 2016

Whitby, United Kingdom

I was not sleeping well and I was getting very despondent about my future.

As I did each day, I spent at least an hour on the beach. I knew that I needed the fresh air and I enjoyed the feeling of the warm sand between my toes. I was anonymous when I was on the beach which gave me time to relax – just a little. Maybe in hindsight my being out in public was *not* such a good idea.

That afternoon, just as I was dusting off my feet and pulling on my socks and boots, I felt something. I was being watched. My mind began to put together things that I had seen consciously and sub-consciously. I did my best not to move faster or otherwise telegraph to my watchers that I had cottoned onto them.

Once my boots were secured, I stood up and I sauntered up the road from the beach. I stopped at an ice-cream van parked on the green before the Royal Hotel and bought a double '99'. That gave me a covert opportunity to survey my surroundings. The glazing in the van allowed me to see who was following me. I pegged a woman and two men. They loitered a dozen or so yards back from me and they were spread out like they did not know each other.

To the layman, they were total strangers and seemed perfectly normal. But to a CIA trained surveillance and counter-surveillance expert, they stood out like a naked man in a girl's changing room. I took my ice-cream and I continued my walk up the street.

I had two options.

I could lose 'em.

I could kill 'em.

November 1st, 2013

An unknown location in the USA

For the very first time, I had been exposed to the real *Predators* in their own environment.

"You're on your own, now, Jamie. I can't go through that door."

I looked up at Rachel as she smiled back. I was about to enter the male section of the *Predator* accommodation. Boys were not allowed in the female section and conversely, the girls were not allowed in the male section. Rachel walked off and I was left with no choice but to heave open one side of the blue-painted double doors.

I slipped through the gap hoping not to be noticed. I found myself in a large open-plan dormitory. I had never been there before – it was off limits to all but *Predators*. I could see about thirty beds, fifteen to a side. It was luxurious compared to my converted punishment cage which in turn had been luxurious compared to what Rachel had been forced to endure. Before I could take in any more...

“Hey – new kid!” came a shout.

I was more used to being ignored. My previous clothing had marked me out as inconsequential and I had liked to be ignored – apart from the odd idiot who chose to hurt me. Now, it seemed, I had the full attention of twenty-nine boys whose ages varied from eight to ten. They were the Phase 1 boys of Dragon Squad. Each phase had six squads making a total of eighteen in the training facility. When you moved between phases you would move to another squad which more suited your abilities which might have changed during your training.

Every phase had a squadron full of losers – Dragon was not that one; currently Dragon Squad was in third place on the Phase 1 leader board. I was shocked to have been sent to join *them* rather than what was nastily nicknamed ‘Derpy Squad’.

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“What are you?” I heard.

“He’s wearing Phase 1 kit . . .”

“He’s tiny!”

“What’s your name, pipsqueak?”

“Jamie Reeman.”

“Ain’t you the kid wearing yellow a few days back?”

I looked up at a boy a good few inches taller than myself. I nodded.

“We needed a replacement and look what they sent us! A useless, skinny, untrained snot.”

I turned to see another kid – he seemed to be the biggest in the room. The black-haired boy might just as well have had ‘bully’ tattooed on his forehead – his attitude stood out a mile. I stepped towards him and I looked straight into his dark green eyes.

“Go fuck yourself!” I growled.

I had no idea what happened over the next few minutes as I soon found myself crying on a bed as my body screamed out in pain.