

The Present

Friday, June 10th, 2016

Whitby, United Kingdom

I was starting to lose consciousness as I fumbled for the pistol at my back, then I heard a voice call out.

“Get off him, you fucking faggot!”

It was a girl’s voice and it had a Yorkshire accent to it. His grip on my neck eased as he turned to see who had called out. I could make out a shape through my blurred vision. The man smirked at the sight of the girl.

“Fresh meat!” he growled as he released me and I fought to get my breath back.

“No fucking chance,” I growled in return as I pulled out my pistol and fired two shots into the man’s head from three feet away.

Luckily, none of the man’s blood or brains landed on me as he fell. The girl ran forwards, seized me by my upper left arm, and dragged me unceremoniously out of the alleyway. I quickly shoved the pistol out of sight before we reached the public street. It looked like nobody had heard the gunshots, or maybe it was just that nobody had recognised them for what they were.

We ran for a good distance before we dived into a small burger joint and I was shoved into a booth.

Well, things had most definitely livened up in sleepy Whitby!

Turned out I wasn’t the only killer kid in the town. I assumed that the boy was the same one the Police were looking for after a man was shot dead in the centre of town, this afternoon. It had to be the right boy unless there were more young boys running around the place with H&K pistols! My afternoon had been peaceful – in fact, the morning had been too – then, while I had been picking out a couple of new t-shirts, I heard the unmistakable sounds of gunfire.

I had dropped the t-shirts and run out of the shop. By the time I reached the scene, I saw one man on the road, he appeared dead. Two more people, a man and a woman, were running towards the swing-bridge. I saw a boy, a pistol in his right hand, running onto the bridge which then started to swing, just as the boy reached the far side. The man and the woman swore violently and they ran for a car before speeding off, leaving their assumed colleague lying in the road.

Once the bridge was back in place, I had headed after the mini-Jason Bourne.

January 1st, 2014

An unknown location in the USA

I reached up and grabbed the girl’s neck.

I felt around for a moment and then I pushed my finger in just where her carotid artery was located. The girl did not seem to notice – she appeared to be still very angry about my grabbing her unmentionables! My strength was ebbing fast. I put everything that I had into holding my finger in place for as long as I could. Wilde was all fired up and it seemed to take quite a while before I felt the

pressure around my own neck begin to subside. I took a deep breath and threw my head back. I caught Wilde on the side of her jaw and she fell backwards with us both tumbling into a pile.

“Get the fuck off me!” Wilde growled.

I punched the girl in the face and as she rolled over, I struck her in a kidney causing her great pain. She kicked out and sent me flying backwards which really hurt but I scrambled back up and poised myself to fend off the attack which I knew was inbound. Then Wilde tripped as Bellamy dripped her purely by accident. I jumped and landed on Wilde’s abdomen. The contents of her lungs were forced out in one go and the girl doubled over the moment I had rolled off her.

I wrapped my arm around her neck with the last of my energy.

“You yield?” I demanded.

I could *not* believe it!

I was stunned and for a moment there was total silence as everybody just stared at the solitary figure left standing. He was bruised, battered, and bloody, but her was victorious. Oscar stepped forwards and for the first time since I had known the Yank, he was genuinely speechless.

“The winner of round two . . . Jamie Reeman . . . bet that sucks, Wilde!” Oscar declared with a derisive laugh at the end.

The silence was broken and there was cheering. Everybody cheered the baby *Predator* as he sank to the ground breathing heavily. Obviously, he had taken all my training to heart and he had fought well. Two boys ran and helped Jamie to his feet and led him over to a chair where he slumped down, a relieved smile on his lips. Another boy passed him a cold can of Coke. I just shook my head as a stretcher was brought out for Andrews who was then taken to the Hospital Wing. Bellamy was hauled off the mat and I saw a very pissed off Wilde glare at Jamie.

One of the few rules was that what happened at Fight Club, stayed at Fight Club. Jamie was safe from any reprisal – mind you, Wilde would receive the ribbing of her life having just been beaten by a boy over two-years her junior.

I closed my eyes for a few minutes and allowed the pain to ease.

When I awoke, the final was underway – two ten-year-old boys were fighting it out. I was still very tired and not fully lucid but I could hear what was going on around me. I tuned into a conversation between two boys.

“He was one lucky brat. If Ascot hadn’t made that deal to have two derpy’s facing Reeman, then he would have been badly hurt. Wilde should have one, only her luck sucked!”

I growled to myself – that bitch had rigged it!

I thought I had won on my own merit. Once the final was over, I looked for Rachel but there was no sign of her. I headed down the corridor to the dining room but she was not there, either. On my way back I smiled at all the surprisingly complimentary comments and then stopped one of the Phase 1 girls.

“You seen Ascot?” I asked.

The girl smirked.

“She’s gone for a shower – you want me to tell her you’re looking for her?”

“Nah – I’ll find her myself.”

I was livid as I made my way to the female dormitory and as I pushed open the double doors, I unwittingly sealed my own fate.

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I had never been in the female dormitory before, however, it was a twin that I slept in so finding the showers was easy. There were many questioning looks as I stormed past the beds and I ignored the partially dressed girls as I went. I shoved open the door to the bathroom, stormed in and then stopped dead.

“Can we help you?”

It was Wilde. She was in the shower directly ahead of me and I winced at the sight of the bruising on her left cheek, not to mention that on her stomach and some vicious red marks on the pale skin between her legs. I barely noticed that the eight-year-old was completely naked.

“I’m looking for Ascot.”

“Well done on downing me, Reeman,” Wilde grinned as if having a boy stare at her in the shower was normal. “Ascot! You have a visitor.”

A head poked out a few showers down.

“What the fuck?”

“I want a word with you!” I yelled as I walked closer.

“What are you doing in here? They find you . . .”

“You rigged the fight!” I growled.

Rachel shrugged and she nodded.

“Yes, only you won fair and square against Wilde.”

Wilde stuck her head out of her shower and she scowled but nodded at me gallantly.

“You are a fucking bitch, Rachel.”

“Yes, I am – now get the fuck out of here before somebody finds you.”

“Thanks,” I offered as Rachel headed back into the shower.

Then the heavens collapsed around me . . .

“*Reeman!*”

I closed my eyes and I groaned inwardly.

I was in *deep* shit!

The Present

Friday, June 10th, 2016

Whitby

I hated to admit it but the girl *had* saved my life...

As we both sat in the crappy seaside burger joint, neither of us said anything. The girl just stared at me, a smirk on her face. But as I got up to grab another straw, I noticed something as I sat back down again. It had been a remote possibility, but it was now confirmed. There, hidden behind the girl's long and slightly curled dirty-blond hair was a small tattoo maybe an inch long and just behind her right earlobe.

I sat back down again.

"If I were to say to you, 'Oakland Falls', what might your response be?" I mused and I studied my saviour's facial expression.

Her pupils dilated slightly which indicated that I had touched a nerve.

"I would probably shoot you dead . . .," she replied with a smile.

"I saw the commando dagger – I've got one too," I said calmly. "They abandon you as well?"

The girl did not hesitate as she grabbed my head and pinned me to the table before she twisted my head none too gently to one side so that she could reach my ear.

"Hey – my head *is* actually attached to me, you know!"

As she let go of my right ear, she released my head and we both sat back.

"Sorry – I'm Shannon Drake..."

"Jamie Carter . . . thanks for saving my life."

"How old are you?"

"In three months, I'll be nine."

"In four months, I'll be fourteen."

January 1st, 2014

An unknown location in the USA

The strap felt like nothing I had ever felt before.

The woman had dragged me out of the bathroom and through the dormitory. There was a surprisingly respectful silence from the girls; they all knew what my fate would be as I was thrust out of the dormitory and hauled towards the male dormitory. The next few minutes were a blur as I was lifted onto a table and pushed down on my front. My shorts were ripped down along with my underwear and after a short pause it began.

All I remember was my screaming as I felt like my backside was on fire. The first blow knocked the air out of my lungs and I struggled to take another breath to scream as I was pinned down by a pair of large hands. Again, I felt pain such as I had never felt before. The burning sensation as the strap came down was beyond any comparison. I lost count and I felt like I had been beaten over a hundred times.

Finally, the hands stopped pressing me down and I just went limp. I was paralysed and nothing I could do would make my limbs operate. I wanted my life to end – at least the pain would come to an end as well.

I sobbed and sobbed.

The Present

Friday, June 10th, 2016

Whitby

“I assume those CIA fuckers are here because of you, Drake?”

“I bumped into them the other day and we had a minor falling out – since then they’ve been trying to kill me.”

“I know what you mean. I blew up my handler with a Claymore – made a mess of the wall.”

Shannon laughed.

“Let’s get outta here. What’s your digs like?”

“Shit!” I growled.

“We’ll grab your kit and you can come stay with me – my place is only borderline shit.”

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She was right – it was borderline shit!

“We share the bed but don’t get any fucking ideas, you little shit!” Shannon growled with an evil smile.

“You’re a nice girl but a little old for my tastes,” I replied innocently. “Besides, I’m eight; I ain’t into girls, not yet.”

“Boys, then?”

“Do you want slapped, slapper?”

“I like you, Carter – you’re fun!”

We stayed indoors for the rest of the afternoon. Considering I was a wanted murderer, Shannon nipped out for some fish and chips. We sat on the floor eating and telling crude jokes. Neither of us broached our *Predator* backgrounds. I sensed that Shannon was pleased to have somebody to talk to. Me? I felt the same, even if it was only some dumb girl.

At ten that night, we both climbed into the single bed and I fell asleep almost straight away.

January 1st, 2014

An unknown location in the USA

I was very surprised to find myself being helped to my bed.

“You took that well, Reeman.”

“You took that like a man, good on yah.”

“Not bad for a little kid.”

“Six at *his* age? Wow!”

January 2nd, 2014

I must have passed out as it was almost lunchtime when I awoke.

Without thinking, I rolled onto my back and they must have heard me in the next continent as I yelled out in agony. Needless to say, I didn't much like the strap. I was also glad that I could pee standing up as sitting was decidedly painful.

I received a strong lecture on boundaries that afternoon. I also received a hearty congratulation from the Doc about my success in the fighting. As promised, I was not hassled by anybody and I never saw a baton raised toward me. While I was eating some improved rations, I received everything from jealous stares to downright surprise. I was the topic of conversation all over the facility.

Abigail Wilde even approached me to say hello and well done. She offered me a re-match when I was older. I apologised about my grabbing her 'down below' but she just laughed it off and admitted that she was still a little sore but no real harm had been done. I felt really good about myself and even better, Rachel was praised for the quality of her training.

Things appeared to be looking up.

The Present

Saturday, June 11th, 2016

Whitby

I felt groggy and the alarm took a while to register in my mind.

What the hell was that piercing screech. My mind added it all up and a single word popped up in my mind.

FIRE!

I bolted awake and began to gag. The room was full of choking black smoke and I could barely make out the illumination from the bathroom light. I punched Shannon in the back and she came awake instantly.

“What the fu . . . oh, shit!”

I shoved the slightly confused Shannon out of the bed and dived for my shoes and my pack. Neither of us had undressed as we were expecting a raid from the friendly guys at Langley. The smoke was getting thicker and I was choking. Shannon grabbed a pair of towels and she soaked both in cold water before she threw one to me and then threw the other over her head. We crawled across the floor with our noses mere millimetres from the manky carpet.

We reached the door but as I ran the back of my hand up the wood, I felt my hand getting hot – the door was a no go.

“The window!” I yelled over the noise of the raging flames. I had never appreciated how noisy a fire could be – not until I was all but surrounded by the killer element.

Shannon reached the window first and she stood up to kick the glass out of the frame. She lifted me up and almost threw me out of the window. We both slid down the roof outside the window and landed on top of a rather prickly hedge. We could see many people. Some were from the B&B and others were just rubber-necking. I checked my watch; it was a little after three in the morning. Blue lights were flashing and two-tone sirens were sounding as a pair of fire engines appeared and jumped into action.

Shannon grabbed my hand and we slunk away from the scene and headed towards the railway station. The first train out of Whitby was at 08:45 that morning and we both intended to be on it.

Assuming we were still alive.

March 23rd, 2014

An unknown location in the USA

Almost three months had passed since I had won that round during *Predator* Fight Club.

The week afterwards had been great but it had ended oh so quickly. It had taken another week to get over my bruised backside and all the jokes that went with it! The festive season had faded quicker than it had arrived and we were immediately back to the training and the lessons.

During the first week in February, I had my first lesson concerning the reason for our being.

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“This week’s topic is one which you are all probably very eager to hear.”

The instructor received blank looks from the class. I looked at the girl sitting beside me. Abigail Wilde just shook her head. I had no idea why she had decided to become my friend but she seemed to sit with me whenever we had the same classes.

“Hit Girl!”

Who? The name sounded vaguely familiar.

“Every *Predator*, in fact this entire program is based upon a single person. She only came to light in mid-2009. Most of you would have still been little babies, back then.”

The instructors liked to have a laugh at our expense but it was funny – that time.

“Very little was known about the purple-clad vigilante. She kept to the shadows along with her guardian and trainer, Big Daddy. Needless to say, Hit Girl was cruel, vindictive, and very violent . . .”

“You met Wilde, Sir?” I quipped to general laughter.

“Thank you, Mr Reeman – yes, Miss Wilde is known to be violent on occasions, however, seeing as she is with you, we are safe from her going on a killing rampage.”

Wilde’s cheeks went red at the intended strike towards her fighting performance at the New Year. There was a little more laughter at her expense before the lights dimmed and a short video was played. I had not known what to expect, and neither had the other kids.

*. . . This, for all you cavemen out there
. . . is fire . . . fire . . . fire is good . . . fire is our friend
. . . Gentlemen . . . time to die . . .’*

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I was stunned when the short clip came to an end. Not only had a man died horribly, a young girl of maybe ten-years-old had killed a dozen more before brazenly shooting out the camera.

“That was the first time that anybody had ever laid eyes on Hit Girl – and lived,” the instructor continued. “That same night she went on a vengeful rampage against a Chicago king-pin, Frank D’Amico. She was assisted, we believe, by her current partner, Kick-Ass.”

Several images of dead bodies and shot-up walls followed. Captions identified it as ‘D’Amico Penthouse’.

“One girl did all that. That, girls and boys, is what you are working to become. While we are moulding you in Hit Girl’s image, Hit Girl is not to be trusted; she is evil and if you should ever come across her – kill her, before she kills you. You will all be seen as a threat and therefore you must be eliminated.”

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“That was way cool!” Wilde announced as we left the classroom.

“Bet you see yourself as Hit Girl,” I commented dryly.

“I liked the utility belt.”

“Typical girl – you lot like anything that’s pink!”

“We do not!” Wilde retorted.

“Do, too!”

We argued all the way to the next class . . .

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At lunch, my other female friend waved me over to join her and a couple of other Phase 2 girls.

“You can join us, Wilde,” Rachel offered.

Wilde appeared a little unsettled at being in the presence of Phase 2 girls – they tended to be very cruel to the younger girls.

“Heard something really awesome, this morning,” Rachel said as all the girls – and me – leant in to listen. “Heard about a girl in another training centre. She killed another girl in *cold blood* – in a shower, stark bollock naked!”

“Doesn’t sound too amazing,” one of the older girls said.

“The killer was eight while the corpse was twelve,” Rachel finished.

“Oh, wow!” Wilde commented.

“Don’t get any ideas, Wilde!” the same older girl laughed. “You couldn’t even put a six-year-old down!”

I pulled Wilde away from the table quickly before she started a fight and became a corpse herself. I related the tale to the Phase 1 boys that night. That caused quite a stir I can assure you – for a group of boys, just the thought of a girl fighting naked . . . well, you get the idea.