

## ***The Present***

***Sunday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016***

### ***Whitby***

We had dutifully left the town on the first train.

Both of us were really tired having slept in three separate places over a five-hour period. The early morning had been chilly and we were both glad to get ourselves some hot tea and a bacon roll before boarding the train.

We both fell asleep very quickly, once aboard.

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Neither of the two tired children had noticed the tall man who had stepped out of the arriving train.

The man had not seen the two children, either. He headed into the now not-so-sleepy town and stopped at the swing bridge. He appeared to be examining the scene which was surrounded by miles of Police tape. He paid extra attention to the trajectories of the gun shots and the distances involved. He nodded approvingly as he checked out the young boy's shooting position and the results of his marksmanship.

Next, he moved onto the scene of a major fire which the Police were investigating as arson. Apparently, petrol had been used along with a high-temperature ignition source. Nobody had died which was fortunate, although several people were in hospital with breathing difficulties due to the smoke.

The hospital was located in Scarborough and that was the astute man's next stop.

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***April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014***

### ***An unknown location in the USA***

Apparently, I had done something right.

The Doc was very happy with my progress and by extension, Rachel would enjoy living a little longer. I had no idea why she appeared upset but she appeared to know something that I did not about my immediate future.

I pressed her but she would not tell me.

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The day seemed to be one long punishment – at least at first.

Mid-morning, I was dragged out of the classroom by a pair of Phase 2 *Predators*. No attempt to impede them was made by the instructor. I found myself almost dragged down corridor after corridor and then into a bare room. The floor was tiled and so were the walls. Rather ominously, there was a very large steel tank in the centre of the room. The tank was full of water and it did not look like a cosy bath.

“Strip him!”

The command came from one of two instructors who stood at the head of the tank. My top and bottoms were pulled off me until I was left in just my undershorts. I began to shiver – with both cold and fright. Nothing about the scene made me see anything good coming out of the unexpected activity.

Then they grabbed me.

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To say that the water was cold would have been a colossal understatement. I had never felt so cold in my entire life. The shock was immense and I struggled against those that held me under the water. What felt like minutes passed in mere seconds as I was pulled up to receive lungful's of fresh, life-giving, air. I had just taken a deep breath when I was shoved back under. I tried to scream. I struggled. I fought. I felt the terror building up inexorably inside me . . . then I was back in the normal world, retching as water poured from my nose and mouth.

Then it began again . . . and again . . . and again.

I lost count of how many times I had been thrust under the water but I was fully aware that the number of times I was thrust under was equally matched by the times I was pulled out again. I was struggling to remain conscious; my lungs were getting little fresh air each time I surfaced and I was exhausted.

Finally, I was dragged out and then I found myself thrust under more water. I screamed out only to find that the water was hot and while it took ages to be felt through my freezing skin, it was the most glorious feeling. They left me alone and I sobbed as I huddled in a corner of the shower. I felt so miserable. What had I done to deserve it? I thought I had done well – I had never felt so sad and so low.

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The next few hours passed in a haze. I was given things to swallow and things to chew. I was given liquids to drink. I felt disorientated. I felt alone. I felt betrayed. I felt anger. I felt loss. I felt like I was no longer James Reeman. What was happening to me?

My final port of call – not that I was to know – was a stark looking room straight out of a hospital. A wheeled hospital bed over to one side, a metal desk with a computer in the centre of the tiled floor. Three steel chairs over in the farthest corner. The chairs were occupied – something familiar about the shapes. Then a voice spoke . . .

“In this program, you will save the lives of our citizens . . .”

The voice was cold and gravelly sounding. The voice scared me. A woman came out of the shadows in one corner of the room. She was old and she smelled. I looked more closely at the three chairs in the opposite corner. A man. A woman. A young girl. The woman droned on and on. Hours must have gone by. I was dragged out of the room twice and I revisited the tank room. Then, I would be warmed up and returned to the room with three people in three chairs and the woman who would go on and on.

I had no idea who she was, but she spoke with a British accent; that in itself was strange as I knew full well that I was currently in the United States of America. The lecture was always something about patriotism, national pride, and saving lives – usually American and British lives. Never any other nationality, but the emphasis was on the *British* aspect, which I assumed was because I was

British. I was a patriot, just like any other British person and the voice seemed to work itself into my mind, deep into my subconscious. I had no idea how long it had all gone on for but I was tired. They would push me into a cell – a real cell, not like those in the punishment block. There was constant noise. I was so tired; I needed rest. I needed to sleep. Then I would be dragged back to that room with three people in three chairs and the woman who would go on and on.

“As part of this program, you will need to sacrifice your old life . . .”

The woman walked me closer to the three people. Though they had hoods covering their heads, I knew exactly who they were. The hoods were not to hide their identities from me; but mine from them. Their clothing was familiar. I knew them. I knew that they were my past. They were my family. Mum, Dad . . . Stephanie.

“An asset’s greatest weakness are those who know them. People who know you can tell others about you; therefore, they *must* be eliminated.”

The woman moved so she stood before me but to the left, away from the three people in the three chairs. She raised her hand, palm up. In it was a black pistol. I recognised it instantly; a Heckler & Koch P30SK.

“Take this weapon and eliminate those closest to you. When you have done so, you will leave here not as who you were, but as Jamie Carter.”

Calmly, I took the weapon from the woman, grip first. I could tell it was loaded, by the weight – three rounds; one for each member of my family. It was easy to do; it felt so deceptively natural. Three gentle squeezes of the trigger were all it took. It was as simple as that. As the smoke from the three rounds was sucked away by the air-conditioning and the sound of the gunshots faded – three bodies lay dead before me. My family was dead. I had killed my family.

The doctor walked over to the slumped bodies. She pulled the hoods from the heads of those slumped bodies. I had shot all three in the head. Almost surgical, instant, clean kills.

My first kills.

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### ***The Present***

***Sunday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016***

***York***

***Jamie with Shannon***

I jerked awake.

I hated that nightmare. Reliving that experience was worse than horrific. Under the drugs the CIA fed a *Predator*, that nightmare rarely occurred. Some *Predators* never realised what they had done, although deep down they knew. We all knew; it was a rite of passage. Nobody talked about it, no matter how brave you were and it was strongly discouraged for obvious reasons.

The train slowing had jerked me awake. Shannon appeared to have snapped awake as well. I smiled as we both executed the same perimeter check out of habit and both of us also checked the backs of our trousers for our pistols. Our rapid escape from Whitby had meant leaving some of our kit

behind. That had included the majority of our weapons cache. We only had about forty rounds between us which was *not* good.

“Oh, shit!” Shannon breathed as the train pulled into the station.

I followed her glance and saw literally dozens of uniformed Police officers.

“Oh, shit!” I echoed.

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### ***Shannon with Jamie***

We were in Coach C of the InterCity 225 train.

Only the locomotive and Coach B had entered the station, along with the first few feet of our coach. I reached up and yanked the emergency stop handle above our seat. The brakes slammed on and at the slow speed the train was moving it stopped quite rapidly.

“Move!” I yelled at Jamie and we both ran towards the opposite end of the train.

We bulldozed our way through Coach D, Coach E, Coach F, Coach H and then through the First Class Coaches, K through L. As we entered Coach M amongst much-annoyed yelling from the other passengers aboard, I yanked the emergency open for the door and forced it open. A few feet below us was open train track and after a quick peek to ensure that we would not be turned into puree, we both dived out the door.

We hit the ground and rolled before regaining our feet and sprinting away from the station.

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### ***Jamie with Shannon***

We jumped a fence and slid down an embankment before racing up Leeman Road for a few hundred yards.

“In here!” I yelled at Shannon and we both dived through a set of double doors into a large museum.

Apparently, entry to the museum was free and we both muttered something about our parents already being inside. After a brief scuttle down some stairs, we both burst into an enormous hall with . . .

“Trains!” Shannon exclaimed unhappily.

“Awesome!” I declared as a smile spread from one side of my face to the other.

“Typical boy!” Shannon growled in my ear. “Have you forgotten that half the world is after us?”

“We need to rest after that sprint and I don’t know about you, but I’m pooped! What better place than a museum to hide in; hundreds of kids and their parents – we blend in. You could be my big sister . . .”

“Oh, for the love of . . .”

“Got a better idea, Stormtide?”

“No, Rage, I do not!” Shannon admitted somewhat stormily.

Shannon stormed off into the crowds of kids and without much pretending she blended in right away with the other teenaged girls who did not want to be there with their brothers. Me? The place was heaven!

“Oh, wow – The Mallard! Shannon, come take my photo!”

“Oh, brother!” Shannon growled as she pulled her phone from her pocket.

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### ***Shannon with Jamie***

We were still in the York National Railway Museum.

The place was secure, for the time being, and Jamie was over the moon – *boys!* The food was a bit on the expensive side but we had not eaten since the previous evening so we stuffed our faces. While we ate, I studied the news reports from around the world, especially the local ones. The only thing of interest was a news piece concerning major drug bust on The Great Lakes, near to Chicago. No specific information about the bust was reported but it sounded cool.

“Anything fun?” Jamie asked through a mouthful of chocolate cake.

“Do you do anything *but* stuff your face?”

“Not if I can help it,” the boy responded honestly.

“Okay. You think they have the Hogwart’s Express in here?”

Jamie laughed. “Typical *girl!* Harry Potter? I ask you!”

I felt my face burning.

“I was just trying to find something train related . . .”

I was, honest.

“Okay – nice try but a major fuck up, Shannon, no Harry Potter in here!”

“Tough crowd!” I growled.

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***April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014***

### ***An unknown location in the USA***

The following morning, I awoke in my own bed.

Everything appeared normal as I headed for the shower. My right ear hurt, or more precisely, the area behind and below it. I bent my ear back and I looked at my reflection in a mirror. What the hell? There was something there. The area was inflamed and very red but there was something there, it was black and it looked like a knife.

“Morning, Carter!”

I turned to see Damien. Great!

“So, you’re one of us now.”

A simple statement.

“What?”

“Look behind my right ear,” he said as he bent down to my height.

I smirked as I grabbed his ear and yanked it.

“Fucking little cunt!”

There, behind the ear was a knife, just like mine, only it was a commando dagger. I let go of the bully.

“That means you are a real *Predator*, kid. Welcome to the club. Still gonna beat the crap outta you!”

That proclamation filled me with joy – real joy and then sarcastic joy!

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On the way to breakfast, my path was blocked by two girls. One was about twelve, the other eight.

“Get out of my way!” I growled.

“Jamie? It’s us: Rachel and Abigail. Remember?” the taller girl said.

“Do I give a fucking shit who you bitches are? Now move; I’m hungry.”

“Okay,” the taller one responded – she looked a little hurt by my response. “Your memory’ll return, Jamie; it usually takes a day or two. Congratulations, by the way.”

“Yeah, congratulations, Jamie,” the shorter girl said as they both moved out of my way.

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### ***Two days later***

They were right on the money.

My memory was back and I tried to apologise to the two girls but they would not listen. Doofus Damien had begun his usual hate trip against me which was nothing new. However, a major distraction was that we were going on a field trip – by air, no less.

After breakfast, about sixty of us had been handed a small plastic tube containing ear plugs. Then, we were sent to the main auditorium to wait. About twenty minutes later, we heard a loud roar of sound outside the building and then the sound of multiple engines. We were then told to insert our earplugs before we were then led out of the auditorium towards the sport’s field.

The moment we reached the outside, we were stunned by the sight of a medium-grey C-130 Hercules aircraft. It was busy manoeuvring part way down the five-thousand-foot concrete strip that ran down one side of the sport’s field. As we watched in awe, the aircraft finished reversing onto the grass as it performed a three-point turn and then headed towards us before it stopped about a hundred yards away. A hatch, just aft of the cockpit opened and our group was waved aboard. The four propellers still spun noisily.

As we climbed up four steps, we were shown to red canvas seats arranged in four rows part way along the length of the aircraft interior. The centre rows were back to back and faced the sides of the aircraft. The noise was enormous and hand gestures were used to guide us. I found myself

seated beside Wilde on the port side of the cavernous aircraft – Rachel was seated several seats away in the centre.

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Once all were aboard, the hatch was closed and we were checked to ensure that we had fastened our harnesses correctly. The aircraft crew wore flight overalls without any insignia despite the aircraft having 'U.S. AIR FORCE' painted above the hatch through which we had climbed aboard. I assumed it was a CIA flight-crew 'borrowing' a USAF Hercules – I did not waste my breath seeking confirmation of my idea.

With a jerk, the engines spun up to a higher speed and the noise got much worse – the ear plugs helped but not all that much. There was a lurch and we began to accelerate forwards. I saw many grins amongst those strapped into their canvas seats as we lifted off into the air and the aircraft banked towards our unknown destination.

The flight lasted barely thirty minutes and we came in steeply to a hard landing and the aircraft taxied fast before coming to a hard stop which threw us all forwards – we loved it!

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After exiting the aircraft, we all found ourselves outside a facility that closely resembled the one that we had just left, only in the distance we could see mountains, instead of our usual nothing.

I followed my fellow *Predators* into an enormous auditorium, much larger than our own. We took our seats about midway down and a little to the left of the stage. A few seats to our right, there was a group of noisy girls that we assumed were from that training centre. The noisiest one of the group appeared to be a girl of about eight, with long blonde hair. Naturally, our group glared at the home team and they glared at the away team – us.

Wilde scowled at the other girls, especially the cocky looking blonde-haired one. A few derisive comments were exchanged but nothing worse, until I put my foot in it.

"Fucking bunch of lesbians!" I announced cheerfully and I was cheered by my own team.

The blonde-haired girl stood up and she moved towards me, along the aisle. Then she glared down at me with her gunmetal-blue eyes.

"Shut the fuck up, you little twat!"

I had noticed that the girl had a very fluid British accent, much like my own, not to mention a very British vocabulary.

"What if I don't, you minging slut?" I retorted.

"I'll kick your balls so far up your body that you won't start puberty before you're sixty, you little shite!"

"Way to go, Psyche!" another girl, a member of the home team, called out.

"If I wanted a bloody compliment from you, Summers, I would have damn well asked for it . . ."

I saw the girl, Summers, flinch away, despite her being several inches taller than 'Psyche'. Something at the back of my mind latched onto the codename – what was a Phase 1 or Phase 2 *Predator* doing with a codename?

“Come on, Carter – let’s move . . .”

I felt Wilde pulling me away from the girls – the auditorium was *not* a place for a fight; not with all the instructors present.

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I had no idea why, but the blond-haired girl intrigued me. She was cute – not quite as cute as Wilde but that was another story . . . for another time . . . probably never. The lecture was about some Hit Girl related shit and I heard Chicago mentioned a few times – I had no idea what it was all about as I kept exchanging jokes with Wilde and she kept giggling as a result.

At one stage, I thought that Wilde might actually piss herself, she giggled so much, and she had her hands firmly pressed between her legs. I received a disapproving glance from Rachel, several seats away and many disapproving glances from that Psyche girl. She did not seem to like me – at all!

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I soon forgot all about the blonde-haired girl as we boarded the Hercules for the return trip that afternoon. However, on my return, I heard some raised voices amongst some instructors – something along the lines of ‘how the fuck was I meant to know’. I also endured a strongly spoken chat with the Doc. I had no idea what he was talking about but he asked probing questions about the other kids I had met on the trip. Finally, I was released and as I left I heard the Doc on the phone: “He has no idea.”

I just shrugged and headed back towards the dining hall – I was starving.