

Sunday, April 24th 2016

The next morning

The Warehouse

The Safehouse had been cleared and we were packing up the Warehouse when the warning came.

My cell rang – it was La Coccinelle.

“Sors, maintenant! Paris est trop dangereux.”

“Merci pour l'avertissement,” I replied. “Au revoir et merci.”

It was time to leave Paris.

Mindy went first.

She grinned at Stephanie, seated beside her, as she floored the gas of her 362-horsepower, metallic catalunya red Audi RS3 Quattro. The nineteen-inch tyres chirped on the concrete floor of the Warehouse as the vehicle accelerated forwards. The red Audi was closely followed by Chloe in an almost identical, but sepang blue, RS3. Beside Chloe, Megan twisted in her seat to check behind her where the metallic glacier white RS3 driven by Joshua with a grinning Hailee seated beside him followed on their tail.

As the convoy cleared Avenue Bugeaud and headed east, they took the exit at the traffic circle for Avenue Victor Hugo where they headed towards the Arc de Triomphe at almost sixty-miles-per-hour. At Rue de Presbourg they were joined by a pair of Audi RS6 Avant Quattro cars, one in metallic mythos black, the other in nardo grey.

Dave smirked at Mindy as he expertly slid the black RS6 in front of his wife. He ignored the indignant blast on the RS3's horn. His two young kids laughed with excitement as they sat in the rear, strapped in tight. The other RS6 joined the convoy at the rear; Jason kept an eye behind, with Abby in the passenger seat.

We knew that the city was closing in on us, we had only minutes to leave the city behind.

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The RS6 executed a perfect power slide as it hit the Place Charles de Gaulle that encircled the Arc de Triomphe.

The red RS3 promptly followed suit, the irate driver determined *not* to be outdone. But before the blue RS3 could follow, an unmarked grey Citroen C5 with blue lights in the grill appeared, siren screaming. The blue RS3 slammed on the brakes and skidded to avoid the police car before the driver regained control and accelerated past – the girl in the passenger seat stuck her middle finger up at the Citroen's infuriated occupants.

So far so good.

The Red Audi RS3

The Arc de Triomphe was typically busy with the usual high standards of French driving...

Our convoy was met with a chorus of car horns and more than a few irate and very rude gestures. I assumed that there were a few choice words spoken too. We circled the giant monument twice and after causing minor gridlock and more than a few collisions, we vanished down the tree-lined Avenue des Champs-Élysées.

“Chloe – no stopping to shop!” I growled.

“Thank you!” Joshua replied.

We were forced to take a hard right onto Avenue George V as several police cars came careering up the Champs-Élysées. I leant on the horn as we shot past trucks and cars then some stupid bitch in a blue Audi RS3 got too close as I slammed on my brakes and she collided with our left quarter!

“Sorry!” Came the apologetic response.

“I’ll make you sorry...!” I growled in response.

There was no time to stop and check the damage but I was reliably informed by the same stupid bitch: “just a tiny little scratch...”

As the avenue came to an end there was a large junction before we crossed over the Seine. I was startled to see a Peugeot 308 stop where it blocked the junction to the left just as several Police cars hurtled down that same street towards us. The young girl in the driver’s seat, with her black hair in a ponytail, smiled at us and she waved as we went past. Was it her? Was it La Coccinelle?

I did not have the time to ponder the question any further as we shot past and south over the River Seine.

The Blue Audi RS3

This was *so* intense!

I loved to drive fast and it was a great experience for me as I rarely got to drive a car back home. Yeah, I got to ride a motorcycle, and I got to ride it fast, but I got such a thrill when I was driving on four wheels.

“I’m close to getting my Initial Driver’s Licence – I should get it when I turn sixteen...”

“With your driving?” Megan demanded with incredulity.

“What’s wrong with my driving?”

The car slid sideways as we narrowly avoided a collision with both a Gendarmerie nationale car and the Audi that Mindy was driving. We had reached the Place Jacques Rueff, in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower.

“Where do I start?” Megan replied as she gripped her seat tightly.

“Stop your winging...”

I wrenched the Audi into a turn to avoid a dented Renault 19 and then again to avoid a group of scared tourists who had blundered into the road ahead.

“... My driving is perfect...”

“Like fuck, it is...!”

Megan screamed as I literally stood on the brakes and the clutch. The Audi came to a very rapid halt only inches from Joshua’s white Audi which had been forced to take evasive action and was now nose to nose with ourselves.

I smiled sheepishly at a shocked Joshua and an ashen Hailee.

The White Audi RS3

“Fucking lunatic that one!”

I glared at Chloe and then turned to Joshua.

“I’m gonna need fresh knickers after all this...”

“Tell me about it...” Joshua growled as he put the Audi into reverse and executed a fast J-turn.

“I think I might need my litter tray...” Wildcat called over the comms.

“Dirty kitty!” Hit Girl retorted with a laugh as she blazed past.

Chloe accelerated after us and we both chased after the laughing Mindy.

The Black Audi RS6

“The Eiffel Tower!” Danny exclaimed.

“So cool!” Anne-Marie called out.

“Sorry we don’t have time to go visit, but we need to put some miles between us and this city, kids,” Dave replied as he expertly slid the Audi between a pair of buses.

Another car joined the chase, this one both unmarked and without lights or siren. The men inside were not Frenchmen and that made them CIA. The large Ford Mondeo was not the best vehicle for a chase through narrow streets, but Americans thought big. While I was driving a vehicle that was just as large, if not larger, I had the advantage of four-wheel-drive which helped to manoeuvre the large station wagon around the tight turns and through the dense traffic.

As I had made the kids aware, we still had a lot of City to cover. We were now moving independently to make things more difficult for the Police and the CIA who, it seemed, had just joined in the chase. Whether it would help us, only time would tell.

The Red Audi RS3

The Peugeot came out of nowhere and it slammed into the side of the RS3 with a large bang.

Neither of us were hurt, but we were momentarily distracted as we both looked over to see two French DGSJ Officers beside us, a blue light flashing on their dashboard. There was much vigorous waving of hands in the typical Gallic fashion, but we both just shrugged and pretended to ignore their gesticulating.

Mindy smashed the left side of the Audi RS3 into the Peugeot hard, bounced off and veered around another car before the DGSi driver rammed his dented car into us again.

“Megan was right about you...”

“Huh?”

“She says you give women drivers a bad name!”

Twenty minutes and a few miles later

The CIA, it transpired, were driving several Ford Mondeos – boring and way too large for the French city.

“Standby for dodge one...” Marty called out as we approached the outskirts of the French capital. “Hard right... Now!”

The red, white and blue RS3s made a hard right into an Audi dealership and skidded to a halt amongst other, almost identical vehicles while their occupants ducked down. The RS6s continued on, with a pair of Mondeos in pursuit, oblivious to the fact that they had just lost three of their targets.

One of the Fords skidded at the next turn and the rear quarter of the large sedan slammed into a parked Renault with a resounding crash. With a scream of tortured metal, the car was wrenched away from the unintended collision by its incensed driver as he continued with the pursuit.

We managed to lose our other tail as we went through a set of lights at red.

All three RS3s narrowly avoided collisions, but the CIA driver did not and he smashed into a Citroen van at speed. We rejoiced, but we were not out of the proverbial woods – not by a long shot... Marty sent us each onto spate routes that he had scouted out via the traffic cameras – how he had hacked into so many of them, I had no idea; it was like he was everywhere at once...

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We joined the Autoroute du Soleil which took us in a southerly direction and past Orly Airport before it turned southeast.

We were all still separated over several miles of Autoroute having taken various routes to escape the City. At the front of the elongated convoy was a wildly sliding Audi RS8 Coupe in Vegas Yellow with a laughing Mathilda at the wheel and a grimacing Nicky in the passenger seat as she hung on for dear life.

“Can we slow down, *please*, Mathilda?”

“Never!”

“Help me!”

The Red Audi RS3

Some way ahead of us, we could just make out the yellow RS8 as it accelerated down the Autoroute.

Mathilda had a habit of driving fast, while that was not a problem in Chicago with her beat up old SUV, a high-powered sports car was something else entirely. Mathilda appeared to be enjoying herself. . . Nicky not so much it seemed... There was nobody else in sight ahead, or behind; we were very much alone as we sped south.

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About twenty minutes and quite a few miles later, I noticed two identical sedan's coming up fast from behind us. I had seen them as they had both come around a bend, both in the centre of the three-lane highway. The two Mondeos operated well together and they did what they could to force us off the Autoroute, but then out of nowhere came a pair of Peugeot vans, both were painted black and in themselves, they looked rather sinister.

The two vans appeared to gang up on one the CIA Fords and then they began to smash into the sedan, one van either side and they neatly guided the Mondeo into a collision with the crash barrier at an off ramp – it was spectacular! The two vans then attempted to trap the other Mondeo but the CIA was wise to that ploy and they left at the next exit, followed by one of the vans. The other van pulled up beside us a smiling face stared down and stuck his thumb up and then raised his other hand with five fingers raised. He winked at me and sped off.

“What do six fingers mean?” Stephanie asked and I just shook my head; I was completely flummoxed.

That afternoon

Mâcon

To avoid attracting unwanted attention, we had taken separate routes south from Paris but kept in constant radio contact. Unfortunately, Joshua had interpreted ‘constant’ as meaning that we all wanted to hear his *extremely* disgusting jokes – despite the merriment at Safehouse F and in the cars, *some were not* amused – Anne-Marie for one.

Eric almost crashed as he laughed at one of the jokes and Jason managed to spill his coffee all over his lap as he laughed.

“I got another one!” Joshua called. “The owner of a chemist walks in to find a guy leaning against a wall. The owner asks the clerk, ‘What’s with that guy over there by the wall?’. The clerk replies, ‘Well, he came in here this morning to get something for his cough. I couldn’t find the cough syrup, so I gave him an entire bottle of laxative.’ The owner was astounded, ‘You idiot! You can’t treat a cough with laxatives!’ The clerk smirked, ‘Oh yeah? Look at him, he’s afraid to cough!’”

That was the final straw, I thought, as I almost pissed myself and Dave slowed right down as he laughed so that we did not crash. It was time to cut that dirty bastard off.

“Battle Guy...”

There was no response for about forty seconds.

“Hit Girl, Lynx here – Battle Guy is unavailable, right now... Can I take a message?”

“Never mind...” I replied sourly and I tried to ignore Lynx’s giggles and the laughter in the background.

After a ‘fairly uneventful’ four-hour drive, we had all arrived safe and sound in the small city of Mâcon, which was about 65km north of Lyon and just over 100km west of Geneva.

The Red Audi RS3

We had stopped for only a few minutes; just long enough to say hello, but little more.

“Hit Girl, Battle Guy – I have the suits and dark sunglasses brigade entering the city!”

“Scramble!” I yelled as we all ran for our vehicles.

The first Mondeo appeared within minutes of us accelerating away. There were five of them but eight cars all told for us, so they would have to split their forces. Unfortunately for Stephanie and me, we were lumbered with a silver Mondeo which drove straight past but which then performed a very slick U-turn and then came after us at speed.

The chase was on.

The Mondeo on our tail dogged our arse for several turns and would not back off, so Mindy slowed and stopped – the Mondeo did the same and came to a halt a few yards back.

I looked up at Mindy quizzically. She smiled at me before she spoke; the smile scared me...

“Brace yourself, kid!”

Mindy shifted the gearstick into reverse and planted her foot on the accelerator before she lifted up on the clutch – I knew how to drive, sort of – and the RS3 shot backwards before it smashed into the front of the Mondeo, rode up onto the bonnet and smashed the windscreen as we came to a rapid halt. After we shifted into first gear, Mindy accelerated forwards and we crashed back to the tarmac with a squeal of rubber and accelerated away.

“How are going to explain that little dent to the insurance company?” I asked.

“Insurance?” Mindy replied with a smirk.

As I checked the mirror, I noticed that the crippled Mondeo did *not* follow.

Ford Mondeo – Unit Three

“You get her, Unit Three?”

“Not really; she got us...”

“You mean you lost them?”

“Crazy bitch just rammed us and now we’re immobilised...”

“Dumb fucks!”

The Black Audi RS6

“Are Mom and Steph okay?”

“Yes, Danny, they’re fine – Mindy ditched her tail in typical Hit Girl manner...”

“She smashed them to smithereens?”

“Yes, Danny,” I laughed.

“I’m worried...” Anne-Marie interjected.

I was too. We were stopped at a red light when I heard gunfire echoing from a distance away – it was an assault rifle... I ignored the red light and floored the accelerator.

“Battle Guy, where are they?”

“Hit Girl’s a mile and a half away...” Battle Guy responded from Safehouse F. “Take your next left...”

The Red Audi RS3

As we turned out of the side street, I saw that we were in *big* trouble.

“Oh fuck!”

There was a man standing in the middle of the street and without any hesitation, he proceeded to empty half a magazine of 5.56-millimetre rounds from his AR-16 rifle towards the Audi, but I jinked left just in time. That kept *me* out of the line of fire, but the bullets stitched across the hood and windshield over on the right-hand-side of the Audi and I inadvertently smashed the left wing into a parked car.

Stephanie screamed out as several of the bullets struck her chest. I pulled out my pistol and emptied the entire magazine into the man as he came towards us. Before the man completed his fall to the tarmac, I had switched out the empty magazine for a loaded one and I then turned in my seat to attend to Stephanie who was writhing in pain.

I pulled open her jacket and ran my hands across her chest – my palms came away clean.

“The suit saved you from the bullets!” I exclaimed, immensely relieved.

“Still hurts like fuck...” Stephanie protested. “I guess I should be glad I don’t have any boobs or this could have been so much more painful...”

“Oh, yeah – tits and bullets, they don’t mix; just ask Chloe.”

“Well, I won’t be playing with them for a while...”

I was very relieved – she may still have had a broken rib or two, but she was alive and still able to crack bad jokes.

“Dave, where the fuck are you?” I called over the radio.

“Right here, beautiful!”

The Audi RS6 skidded to a halt mere feet away from Stephanie's side of the car and I could smell hot rubber.

"Okay, we're bailing!"

I jumped out of the car and helped Stephanie into the RS6 where I shoved Anne-Marie over into the middle seat. Next, I retrieved our bags from the trunk of the RS3 and threw them into the capacious back of the RS6, which Dave had opened remotely.

I moved back towards the RS3.

The Black Audi RS6

"What about our fingerprints?"

"You're forgetting *who* your mother is, Steph," I chuckled as Mindy dumped hers and Stephanie's bags into the back.

As we watched, Mindy then walked over to the Red RS3, and she calmly opened the passenger door, pulled the pins from a pair of hand grenades before she then dumped them both onto the passenger seat inside the car. She casually closed the door, locked the RS3 and just as casually, she walked around to the other side of the RS6 and climbed in.

"Better move, Dave!"

I needed no further encouragement as I floored the accelerator and all four tyres bit into the tarmac as we shot forwards, mere seconds before the grenades detonated. The explosion blasted out the glass of the RS3 and turned the car into a blazing pyre.

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"Are you okay, Steph?" Anne-Marie asked as she turned to see her big sister crying.

"What happened?" I asked urgently.

"She got shot..." Mindy said. "Several times... But her suit saved her – she may have one or two broken ribs, though."

"Holy shit – are you alright, Steph?" I demanded.

"Yes..." Stephanie replied very quietly as she sobbed with the pain.

"I think we need to call it a day, Mindy."

"I agree – Battle Guy, Hit Girl..."

"Go ahead, Hit Girl."

"We're clear, but Psyche is injured – we're gonna lay up for the night."

"Shit – is she okay?"

"Her suit saved her life..."

"No problem," Battle Guy replied. "Find a place to hole up and get some rest – I'll contact you with a rendezvous for tomorrow... Oh, and Hit Girl?"

“Yeah?”

“Take the night off – be a family, okay?”

“Copy that, and thanks – night!”

“Let’s get the hell out of France!” Dave commented as we drove very fast towards the Swiss border.

An hour later

Geneva, Switzerland

We had crossed over the border at Chancy – we had not been challenged, as we had hoped – and forty minutes after that we were in Geneva where we headed for a hotel.

“Let’s go for something nice,” Dave commented as he pulled up outside a large building on the Quai Turretini. “Let’s go, family!”

“Good evening, and welcome to the Mandarin Oriental...” the valet said as he opened my door – I liked it when somebody opened my door.

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The moment we reached our suite, Stephanie ran into one of the two bedrooms and she collapsed onto a bed, wrapped her arms tightly around her chest and she sobbed with the pain – the girl had held it all in since she had left the car. I sent the twins to watch TV while I tried to get Stephanie’s top off so I could see the damage. She was *not* cooperating and I did not want to hurt her any more than she already was.

Dave came in with some very strong painkillers and a bottle of still water – one of the advantages of being a vigilante was that you were almost as skilled as a pharmacist. You knew exactly what drugs to take to heal wounds and what drugs to use to kill pain, and in what quantities. We were intentionally overdosing Stephanie, but nothing that would actually hurt her.

Dave grabbed hold of the screaming girl and he pulled her head back so I could more easily shove the three tablets into her mouth.

“Swallow them, Steph; they will help you.”

I held the bottle to her mouth and the struggling girl reluctantly swallowed the tablets while she fought back the pain as she did so. She was a very brave young girl, but that moment was *not* the time for bravery. I gently eased off her jacket with Dave’s help – Stephanie was quite strong when she needed to be. After some wrestling and some very bad language from us both, we removed the top of her combat suit, plus the underlying t-shirt and let her lie down.

Stephanie’s chest was red, black and blue – it looked a mess and was not far off what Hailee’s chest had looked like after her beating. I had no choice but to check for broken ribs – I knew what to look for as I had been shot myself, many times. After some painful prodding and some extremely coarse and vulgar language from the patient, I gave Stephanie a clean bill of health – apart from the heavy bruising of course.

“You two finished?” Stephanie grimaced as I stood back and smiled.

“Lie on your back and try to get some rest, okay?”

Stephanie reluctantly nodded her acceptance and she forced a smile as I gently placed a blanket over her.

“Yes, Mum!”

“Is she okay?”

I looked at my other kids as I closed the door to the bedroom behind me.

“She’s badly bruised, but nothing that won’t heal – she needs some rest, so please, leave her alone tonight.”

“We will, won’t we, Danny?”

“Anything to help her heal,” Danny replied to his sister’s question.

“That was scary,” Anne-Marie went on.

“Injuries happen in our line of work, but that’s two people down with injuries now and I have a nasty feeling that we still have a very long way to go. Dave, we’re gonna need some reinforcements if this keeps up – I think we need to get them prepared to fly out.”

“I think you could be right; we set this up before we left and hoped that we would not need them,” Dave replied as he wrapped his muscular arms around me and I leant into his manly warmth.

“I’ll tell Marty tomorrow and he can prepare them. For now, we need to eat – I’ll leave room service up to you, Dave. Oh, don’t forget to order something for short-ass in the bedroom...”

When I awoke, it was dark.

I tried to sit up, but I stifled a scream as pain ripped through me.

“Take it easy,” a voice said quietly and I recognised the voice of my little sister.

A light came on.

I looked around and saw that I was lying on one side of the double bed, Danny was on a cot a few feet away. Anne-Marie was lying beside me.

“What time is it?”

“About ten o’clock – you’ve been asleep for a few hours. We were all very worried about you.”

“How am I?”

“Your chest is every colour that it should not be, but you’re still breathing.”

I forced myself to sit up and did my best to ignore the pain. I felt ashamed as tears fell down my cheeks. Anne-Marie noticed.

“Give it a damn rest, Steph – you’re not a vigilante right now, you’re just a normal little girl and you’re with your family.”

Anne-Marie smiled and I smiled back.

“Thanks. What else has been happening?”

“There’s some food for you if you’re hungry – and SD has called for you about a dozen times.”

“Why . . . does she know?”

“Apparently she was at Safehouse F and she heard everything – she thought you were badly hurt or dead.”

“You’d better find me a phone, then.”

Anne-Marie scampered off and she soon returned with Mindy and a phone.

“How are you feeling?”

“Not good...” I grimaced.

“Don’t be too long on the phone – come on, you two, give Steph some privacy, please.”

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I dialled the phone and waited.

“Hello...” The voice that answered said tentatively.

“You thought I was dead?”

“STEPHANIE!”

I had to yank the phone away from my ear as SD almost shattered my eardrum,

“Are you hurt, are you okay, is anything broken, is...”

“SD, I’m fine – well a little bruised – I just wish that people would stop trying to kill me; you know what I’m saying?” I responded and I smiled inside at my little joke.

There was a moment’s silence.

“Not funny, Stephanie Lizewski!”

“Sorry, just a bit of gallows humour; I’m feeling a bit low.”

“It’s okay, you scared me was all – you *know* I hate being reminded of what I did...”

“It was unfair, Saoirse, and I’m sorry.”

“Never mind – where are you bruised?”

“My chest mainly – it looks like three or four bullets struck me, but none penetrated.”

“Lucky bitch!”