

Wednesday, April 27th 2016

00:45

Urban Predator Training Facility, Milan, Italy

It was no longer a training facility – it was a fucking tomb.

“How could they...!” Shadow exclaimed.

“Somebody went fucking Order 66 on these kids!” Josh interjected

I had never seen so much carnage; at least not of the kind that lay before me... I counted each body, from the smaller ones, up to the bigger ones . . . twenty-six in total. I was not the only one counting, either.

“They killed twenty-six kids...” Shadow went on, incredulous. “Some of them are younger than Stephanie, for fuck’s sake!”

They had all been shot and my trained eye saw that many of the wounds had been inflicted as the kids had tried to run away from the danger. I knelt down and closed the staring blue eyes of a young girl about the same age as Anne-Marie, her beauty marred by the single .40-calibre hole in her forehead.

I had not felt so much anger since...

I had *never* felt so much anger...

The anger, however, had heightened my senses and I heard something above us; I recognised the sound of an AR-15 being brought to readiness.

It was an obvious ambush.

“Stand to!” I called out, just as the gunfire began and we all bolted for cover.

I fired off a dozen rounds in the direction of the nearest enemy gunman and I was rewarded with a cloud of red as his head exploded. The eight of us moved forward as one and we mowed down anybody that got in our way – no quarter was given, not after what we had seen...

I could hear heavy rounds as they struck the building and shattered windows – Leon and Wraith were getting in on the action. Sceptre and Nemesis were around the back of the building; they would ensure that nobody escaped.

With the assistance of Psyche, I managed to work my way up the left flank and into a position where we could strike at the heart of the men who had ambushed us. Psyche was obviously enjoying herself, I noticed, as we made our way forwards; she was dropping men with single and precise head shots.

Without warning, a man appeared from our left and he raised a .45-calibre pistol; it was aimed directly at Psyche.

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I yelled out an urgent warning – Psyche’s armour would not protect her from a round that large.

There was nothing any of us could do, but then, out of the shadows a shape moved – it was a shape seemingly out of nowhere, but somehow it seemed familiar. Whoever it was, they threw themselves between the gun and my daughter, just as the man pulled the trigger several times.

Psyche had turned as she had heard my warning, so she was protected from most of the bullets as she herself fired her own pistol at the man; she put two bullets into his forehead and blew the cunts head apart. Two of the heavy bullets passed through her protector and they struck Psyche's body. She screamed at the pain as she was forced to the floor by the impacts.

Her protector landed in a heap and did not move. I ran forwards in a panic and checked on my daughter; she was okay, just in a lot of pain. I checked on 'the protector' and I was beyond stunned by what, or rather *who*, I had found.

"Hi, Mindy!"

"Miranda!"

Psyche scrambled towards me and then she froze as she saw her mentor lying in an ever increasing pool of blood.

"Why?" was all the young vigilante could say.

"I had to protect you..."

Miranda began to cough up blood – she did not have long in the land of the living. Psyche knelt down beside her friend and held her hand tightly. Despite Psyche's mask, I knew that she would be crying...

"No – you can't die..."

"It happens and you know that..."

I really felt for Stephanie; she had lost so much in her short life. I saw her body shudder as she sobbed and she held tightly onto Miranda's hand. I had been in a very similar position, only a few years before and I could relate one hundred percent.

"You *will* take them down, won't you Mindy?"

"I promise you; they will hurt nobody else and we *will* put them down in hell where they damn well belong," I growled back – I struggled to control my emotions.

Miranda was fading fast and I saw her grip on her companion's hand loosening, but Psyche held on tight as if that would prolong Miranda's life.

"Please, please – we've got to do something . . . she *has* to survive..."

I bit my lip till I tasted blood; there was nothing I could do or say.

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I saw Miranda's eyes lose focus and then she went limp; she was gone. Dave gently eased Stephanie to her feet – she was on autopilot and the distraught girl did not fight his actions. She allowed Miranda's hand to slip from her grip and then she walked away before she turned one last time. I saw her fists ball tightly and her body shake as she cried. Then after a few moments she just stopped and she did not move for almost a full minute.

Finally, she straightened up and she pulled out her holstered pistols, dumped both magazines and reloaded. She kept both pistols to hand as she ran back towards the fight where I saw men begin to fall as she dived amongst them. The young vigilante was somewhat pissed-off; I could tell – each man was put down by a double-tap into his stomach.

A very slow and a very painful death.

The fighting continued.

I wasn't sure if anybody else had seen Miranda, or how she had died. Some had, however, noticed the change in Psyche's demeanour.

"Someone piss on a Union Flag or something?" Shadow queried as Psyche bolted past and her Sais severed the femoral arteries of the man that Shadow was fighting.

"Later, Shadow, later..."

We all had our own ways to cope with grief. Like Hit Girl – Psyche chose to kill to appease her grief and while I went for the quick kills – mostly, she concentrated on causing as much pain as she possibly could, including slow, drawn-out deaths.

Damn, she was cold.

I decided enough was enough when Psyche began to disassemble some poor bastard as he bled out.

She was determined to kill and maim until none remained – all those that were still breathing were not long from hell. While Hit Girl enjoyed to maim and kill as much as the next psychotic vigilante, there was a point where it all just turned weird and Psyche had gone well past that point.

"Psyche, stop!"

To my surprise, she did exactly that and she dropped the man's severed lower leg vaguely where it belonged. Her combat knife was wiped clean on the still breathing corpse and then returned to its scabbard on her belt. Finally, she turned to me and she nodded.

"Let's go, Hit Girl – *please* . . . just get me out of here..."

01:50

The Warehouse

Psyche had not spoken since we had left Miranda's body.

Once back at the warehouse, she stoically pulled off her mask and she just stood there – no tears, nothing. Dave looked at me and I nodded in understanding. Stephanie was waiting until everybody had left, but I knew that she could not hold out that long – Dave put an arm around the young girl's shoulders and led her towards the makeshift office in the back of the warehouse.

I followed and closed the door as the floodgates opened. Stephanie grabbed me around the waist and she cried harder than I had ever seen anybody cry. Dave wrapped himself around us both and held us tight and I felt the warm sting as tears streamed down my own face. No matter what I

thought of Miranda and her previous relationship with Dave, the woman had protected my daughter and she had saved her from certain death – I owed her, but there was nothing else I could do about it, not for the moment anyway.

I held onto Stephanie until she finally ran out of tears.

The changing area was clear when we re-emerged from the office and the three of us rapidly showered and dressed in normal clothes.

The first face we saw was Chloe and her expression demanded answers.

“If it’s not my place, just tell me to fuck off, but I’m worried about Steph.”

Stephanie pulled away from Dave and she walked over to Chloe.

“She saved my life – again. Now she’s dead and...”

Stephanie fell into the rather bemused Chloe’s arms and the younger girl began to cry her heart out again. Chloe was unsure about what to do or say, but she just hugged the girl for lack of anything else to do.

“Where she came from, I have no fucking idea, but Miranda Swedlow was there and she took several bullets, much like Josh did for you – only Miranda died...”

Chloe’s expression said it all and she hugged Stephanie tighter.

“I’m so sorry, Steph, I really am.”

03:55

Milan, Italy

Everybody was very pleased to be leaving Milan.

It had been a literal hell on earth. We headed northwest into the mountains while we were still covered by the cloak of darkness. Stephanie, Anne-Marie, and Danny were fast asleep in the back seat. I was glad that Stephanie was asleep; it gave the poor girl a chance to rest as she was completely exhausted after the night’s operations and subsequent occurrences.

She was not injured, thankfully, but some more very vivid bruises had been added to her already impressive collection.

Three hours later, at Bormio, we pulled over for fuel in the town at a 24-hour gas station.

While I was pumping gas, I was joined by a tired Stephanie.

“You awake?” I asked rhetorically

“Yeah; I feel like crap and I need to wee...”

“Over there,” I chuckled as the ten-year-old girl headed for the restroom.

A few minutes later, Stephanie returned and she looked refreshed. She had washed her face and all traces of the night's tears were gone.

"Happy birthday!"

Stephanie's eyes went wide at my comment.

"Thanks, Mindy – I'd almost forgotten."

"What's up?" I asked and I sensed that something was wrong; I assumed that it would be about Miranda.

"Can I call Saoirse – it's *her* birthday, too?"

A surprise, but not a huge one.

"After lunch – they're seven hours behind us, remember."

"Oh, okay... Time zones fucking suck!"

There was movement as the others began to stir and make their way to the bathrooms.

After the stop, we were about to move off, when I turned to Dave.

"You might want to change cars..." I advised my husband.

"Why would I want to do that?" Dave asked

I indicated the back seat and then held up a DVD. Dave peered into the backseats which were now occupied by Megan, Anne-Marie, and Stephanie. Danny was climbing in with Jason. He glared at the DVD and his expression was filled with abject horror.

"I'm so outta here!" He growled.

He stomped over to Joshua and Chloe who were climbing into their RS3 and he seized hold of Chloe's arm as she was about to sit down.

"Out!" He ordered and Chloe obeyed but looked very confused. "You're riding with *them...*"

Chloe looked over at me and then she grinned.

"Hey, Bitch Mobile – *awesome!*"

Dave jumped into the RS3, disgust etched on his face, and he slammed the door. Chloe strode over, climbed in and smiled at the three girls; then she saw the DVD.

"Equestria Girls: Rainbow Rocks; totally awesome, My Little Pony – let's ride, bitches!"

We turned onto the Stelvio Pass road.

"Fuck, no!" Stephanie exclaimed when she figured out the type of road we were going to be driving on. "Can't these fuckers build straight fucking roads?"

The Blue Audi RS3

“That was so damn close!”

“It’s not *that* bad, Dave...”

“What damned midget last drove this car!”

Dave was constantly adjusting the seat as Chloe was quite a bit shorter! Dave had a bad reaction to My Little Pony, but I had no idea why... For the moment Dave was attempting to catch up with the RS6 which was several turns ahead of us. Dave was really hammering the RS3, but Mindy was just that little bit more daring in the turns and she tended to pull ahead, much to Dave’s chagrin. It was only when we found a cut-through that I had been searching for on my map that we were able to pull ahead.

It would be tight...

The Black Audi RS6

... First you see me riding on a sonic boom... Got my guitar shredding up my latest tune... There is nothing you can do to beat me... I'm so good that you can't defeat me... Yeah, I'm Awesome... Take caution... Watch out for me, I'm Awesome as I wanna be! Yeah, I'm Awesome... Take caution... Watch out for me...

I interrupted the Rainbow Dash lovefest.

“Where are they?”

Chloe twisted around in her seat and looked at the road behind us.

“I don’t know... They stop?”

“Those two are devious...” I growled.

I was watching the mirror and I barely noticed the dust cloud that approached from my right... Big mistake! With a roar the now very dusty and mud streaked, blue RS3 burst out of a side road and with a squeal of protesting rubber took up position a few yards ahead of us.

“In your face, Hit Girl!” Dave growled in triumph as he accelerated ahead.

I was speechless with rage as I buried the pedal into the floor and accelerated hard. Chloe yelled obscenities through the windshield at the other car. The bastard was blocking me at every opportunity, much as I had done to him... I was about to try and force my way past when it suddenly occurred to me that I had kids in the car and I decided not to drive like an ass – Dave would win that leg of the drive...

There would be plenty more opportunities to kick his ass!

Four and a half hours (and two My Little Pony DVDs) later

Innsbruck, Austria

Neither Stephanie nor Megan had deigned to talk about their experiences – at all.

Joshua had been the same; Chloe had got precisely nowhere with him and believe me, she had tried *everything* that she could think of... Both girls were very good at hiding their feelings; but Anne-Marie knew for a fact that something was wrong, just not what. She sat between her Aunt and her Sister, a hand rested on the arm of each older girl. She alternated her hugs with each girl in turn about every few minutes.

It was Chloe that had noticed it and we both agreed that it was actually very sweet.

While in Austria, we stopped for a break and an early lunch.

"Can I talk with you, Megan?"

"You don't need to ask, Steph; you know that. We're partners and we've promised to tell each other everything."

I dived for the door that Megan had just opened.

"Okay . . . what happened last night?"

Megan rolled her eyes as she saw the trap that she had just laid for herself and then walked straight into.

"Did Mindy put you up to this?"

I felt genuinely hurt by Megan's insinuation and my expression relayed that fact in no uncertain terms.

"No. I genuinely do care about you."

"Sorry, that wasn't fair."

"No, it was not..."

..._...

"The apartment was being monitored and I think we walked straight into a trap. I managed to draw my knife, but then everything went black for a while and I woke up in the cell. I was really scared when they took us; Josh had been knocked out and I was concerned about him as well as what I could do to try and protect myself. He was out for a while and all I could think about was Hailee and the state that she was in when she was rescued..."

"I can believe that," I admitted darkly.

"They stripped me when they found more than just my gun and a knife. At first it was those Mafia bastards, but they ran their filthy hands across my body and I felt so dirty..."

I noticed tears in Megan's eyes as she related the tale.

"I was left in just my underwear which was hugely embarrassing, I can tell you... Josh woke up, but we were chained to walls a few feet apart and we were both handcuffed. Well, one thing led to another and we were visited by two of your lot..."

I growled at that. "They are *not* 'my lot'!" I bristled.

"Sorry – just a phrase – calm down! I dubbed them Urban Princess and Urban Prick – a boy and girl team; she was about fifteen and he was about thirteen. They were running the Mafia dicks and they were how we had been captured – no fucking Mafia could capture Wildcat and Jackal!"

I laughed at that.

"They took Josh's body armour and that stuck-up British bitch tried to cosy up to him – she examined his scars; then she turned to me and she saw my stab wounds... After having my cuffs removed, she checked me out and then she yanked down my shorts and exposed me to those Mafia bastards and Urban Prick. I had never felt so humiliated up to that point... Josh reacted really badly and he began to verbally abuse the wankers. The boy kicked Josh to the ground and pounded into him until Josh lost consciousness."

"Fuck, Megan – I'm really sorry for bringing it all up..."

"No, don't be; I had to tell somebody, why not my partner and niece..."

"You can be so sweet," I laughed.

"Don't let anybody hear you saying that; I have a reputation to uphold."

"So – what happened next?"

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"While Urban Princess was focussed on the unconscious Josh, I managed to grab the Glock from her hands and I pistol whipped her – left a nasty mark on her right cheek too! I don't think she liked me doing that 'cause she pinned me to the floor and ripped off my sports bra and shorts which left me completely naked, before she re-cuffed me again."

I noticed that Megan blushed slightly as she related her experiences to me and to be honest, I felt embarrassed for her as well as for myself as I listened to what had occurred to her.

"Please tell me that it does *not* get any worse..."

Megan's grimace said otherwise...

"It gets *much* worse... Josh regained consciousness and this time I was able to help him as they had not restrained me with the chain. He was more than a little shocked to see me naked and yes, I was embarrassed, but he did avert his eyes and I told him to stop being stupid; he'd seen me naked before anyhow and not much has changed. Well, *they* came back and Joshua started on them again... The girl . . . she told the boy to 'go play with his naked toy' ... I was scared that I was about to be raped; I was completely naked and my hands were cuffed behind my back.

"The boy dragged me off, out of the cell. I felt so exposed and vulnerable; he could do anything to me and there would have been nothing that I could do about it... He took me into another room, a few yards down the corridor – it was bare concrete and there was no furniture, nothing; but there was a ring bolt set into the wall and he led me towards it. He put his pistol to my head and undid one cuff, told me to hold my arms out in front of me, he then put the cuff back on and told me to lie down with my arms above my head.

"I felt really scared as I laid down on the cold concrete floor. He used another set of cuffs to secure those on my wrists to the ring bolt set into the wall. He ordered me to spread my legs; I hesitated, so he kicked them open and I felt myself shaking as I did so. He placed the gun down on the floor, well

away from me. Then he came back and faced me; the look on his face scared me and I could see a bulge in his trousers – that freaked me out.”

“Ewww!” I muttered.

“Then Urban Prick undid his jeans and he pushed them down his legs, followed by his shorts... That was when everything changed – he was hard, but not all that large, nor did he have very much hair. He began to, you know...”

“Not really...”

Megan was really blushing now.

“He was rubbing himself and enjoying it too as he stared at my bits . . . that really freaked me out, but then I giggled and he glared at me. I couldn’t help it – he seemed to be struggling a bit, then he came and it went all over my stomach; it was so disgusting and degrading!”

“I’ll bet...”

“I was still giggling... He demanded to know what was so funny; so I told him. I said, ‘it’s a bit small, mate, maybe you should let it grow a bit before you show it to the girls’ – he freaked!”

I laughed at what Megan had just said; the boy would have been mortified, to say the least.

“What did he do?”

“He yelled at me and called me a ‘worthless bitch with non-existent tits that probably shagged every boy in sight’.”

“Nice!”

“He undid the cuffs that secured me to the ring, dragged me to my feet and then back to the cell. Urban Princess’ heart seemed to have melted slightly as she gave me back my clothes and allowed me to dress before I was chained back up again. She left.

“By this time, Josh had had enough and he managed to pull his chains from the wall – he’s really strong and his muscles ripple when... Anyway, I had a pin in my hair and Josh used it to pick the locks on his cuffs and I did my own cuffs. We made a noise – the guard appeared and we took him down and seized his weapons.

“Then *they* appeared and we fought. We beat them down and Josh seized her – she was called Discord, by the way. Josh went totally mental and well, he stripped Discord naked and forced her outside where he meant to kill her, but he relented and left her. That was it.”

“Would he have killed that girl?” I asked.

“I don’t know; I know Josh really well, but he has a dark side...”

“You two have a seemingly unbreakable bond...”

“Yeah, I love him dearly; he’s like a big brother to me and he’s always there when I need him...”

“I know – without his support, I would have crumbled months ago...”

“Back to the original question...”

"Would I have killed her?" came a voice and we turned to see Joshua as he strode over to us and sat down. "Yes, I would have killed her, if Megan had not appealed to my compassionate nature."

"By the sounds of it, she *needed* to die," I commented.

"Yes, but she showed signs of wanting to live a normal life; she gave me back my clothes when she didn't need to – she showed compassion," Megan countered.

"That was why I did not kill her – I couldn't; she showed Megan compassion and she showed that she had the potential to change..."

"Maybe we'll find her again and we can help her..." Megan said quietly.

"You have a heart of gold, Megan and you always bring the best out in people," Joshua said as he hugged Megan. "Even some nutcase from the *Urban Predator* school of wackos!"

"Hey!" I growled.

"You're special, Steph, and how you became what you are is nothing compared to what you are now," Josh said as he pulled me into the hug.

"What are you three up to?"

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We split apart to see Mindy and Chloe walking over.

"Did they just tell you their story?" Chloe asked incredulously.

"I have a way with people..." I muttered.

"Yeah – 'tell me or I kill you'!" Mindy laughed.

I scowled at that, but let it go as Mindy nodded approvingly.

"It felt good to get it out and I'm sorry that I could not be there for *you*, Steph," Megan said.

"I'll be fine; we have a job to do and I am damn well going to finish it," I replied.

"She's right," Joshua admitted. "We're going to see this through to the end..."

"... and get those motherfuckers that ruined Stephanie's life!" Megan finished.

"Well said, both of you," Mindy said. "Let's get a move on, Germany awaits."