

Wednesday, April 20th 2016

That same time

Chicago, USA

Morton Grove

Curtis had been keeping himself busy ever since his cousin and best friend had vanished to Europe; it had been the only way for him not to miss her too much.

Every evening he would be glued to his laptop, looking for any references to *Fusion* and what they might be doing across the Atlantic Ocean. Knowing Mindy, the way that I did, I was half expecting to see a 'breaking news' item every time I watched the evening news, but none came, until...

"Aunt Cathy! You gotta see this..."

Curtis appeared with his laptop and within a minute the image on the TV changed. I saw a YouTube window appear. Then a moment later a video began to play.

"It's from less than an hour ago..." Curtis explained.

The video was of London; that seemed obvious and then I heard a siren blaring and a large BMW SUV came into the shot – rather strangely it was painted red, but marked up as a Police vehicle. The blue strobe lights on the roof were flashing along with the blue and white lights set into the grill at the front of the vehicle. The vehicle was working its way through moderate traffic towards a busy junction and somebody was filming it on their cell phone.

Then, just as the vehicle came really close to the camera, Curtis froze the image.

"Can you see who's driving?" Curtis asked with an enormous grin.

I looked closely and then sat back, stunned.

"You have *got* to be kidding!" I exclaimed.

"It's only fucking Mindy!" Curtis laughed. "That must be Stephanie beside her."

Then he turned serious as he pressed play again. We watched the vehicle drive past and yes, in profile, it definitely looked like Mindy was driving and yes, there was a short person in the passenger seat! He paused the video again and my hand went to my mouth in shock.

"Oh my God!"

"Those are bullet holes and the rear window is smashed!" Curtis exclaimed.

"Well, they seem to be alive at any rate..."

That afternoon

United Kingdom

One person had *not* made the rendezvous.

"Where, is Hailee?" I asked pointedly once the love fest was all but over.

Abby looked wretched.

“She headed out the west exit as planned; I saw her – she should have checked in earlier, but I assumed that her comms were down and that she would meet us at the emergency rendezvous – here.”

I glared at Abby.

“Assumption is the *mother* of all fuck ups!” I yelled and instantly regretted it as Abby flinched backwards, away from me. “I’m sorry, Abby, I did not mean that... Where is she?”

“I don’t know. I tried to ping her cell but got no response...”

That, was when my cell rang.

I did not recognise the number.

“Hello...”

There was silence for a few seconds...

“...Help...”

I recognised the voice instantly... it was Hailee.

“Where are you?”

“I don’t know... I’m scared.”

“What happened?”

“They took me...”

“Focus!”

“I’m in a house... *They are coming!*”

I heard the sound of a door opening, a yell of anger, then footsteps... A scream; Hailee’s scream... The phone she had been using fell to the floor.

“Get off me you fucking bastards... I’ll fucking kill you...”

I heard punches and yells of pain before I heard yet another scream from Hailee, then I heard her no more. Instead I heard lots of movement and then I heard the sound of rustling as the other phone was picked up and . . . breathing.

“I don’t know who you are, I don’t know what you want. If you are looking for ransom, I can tell you I don’t have money. But what I do have are a very particular set of skills, skills I have acquired over a very long career. Skills that make me a nightmare for people like you. If you let the girl go now, that’ll be the end of it. I will not look for you; I will not pursue you. But if you don’t, I will look for you, I will find you, and I *will* kill you.”

There was a significant pause before the reply came.

“Good luck...”

The call dropped off.

Two hours later

I was pacing around the room in the Premier Inn, restless and angry.

One of the team was missing and she was most probably in the gravest of danger. I hoped to God that she would have the fortitude to be able to look after herself – at least until we found her. Why her? They could have taken anybody . . . despite everything that we had been through, I had a lot of respect for Hailee while her experience and skills were second only to my own. The girl was strong and I knew that she would put up one hell of a fight.

We had already received confirmation that she had been taken – somehow she had obtained a phone; I had a distinct feeling that she would have been severely punished for that... I knew that the girl would be tortured for information; it all depended on who had taken her and exactly what they wanted. There had been no call for ransom, so it was obvious that when they were finished with Hailee...

We had to find her.

That evening***West of London***

“Where are we going?”

“To meet somebody, Steph...”

“I can sense a fib a mile off – don’t lie to me, Mindy...”

I smiled at the girl as I responded.

“I’m not...”

“Stop!” Stephanie suddenly yelled out.

I stopped the car with a jerk.

“Hey!” Anne-Marie demanded. “What’s going on?”

“I know this place – I went to school right there when I was seven...”

Stephanie was staring out the side window and she seemed mesmerised by the primary school just across the road. I parked the car as a red Vauxhall Insignia pulled up after flashing its headlights at me. I climbed out of the car, followed by Stephanie and Anne-Marie. Out of the other car stepped a woman with auburn hair, she was about five-feet-five-inches in height and she was dressed smartly in a grey trouser suit.

“Hi, Mrs Lizewski, I’m Debbie Grey and I’m a friend of Spook...”

“Please, call me Mindy, Debbie,” I replied. “This is Stephanie and Anne-Marie.”

“Ah, Stephanie Lizewski, AKA Stephanie Walker, AKA Stephanie Reeman...” Debbie began.

“What?” Stephanie exclaimed.

“... Daughter of Mark and Jocelyn Reeman, sister to James Reeman.”

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Stephanie seemed stunned by the revelation...

“My name was Stephanie Reeman?”

“Yes, it was – Mindy asked us to see what we could find out about your parents. They were officially declared dead, along with you and your brother, about six months ago. All assets were liquidated and the proceeds deposited in a bank account in case a relative came forward,” Debbie explained. “You are now the beneficiary of those assets, Stephanie – here is a document detailing the account details and the balance.”

I took the letter and opened it, then showed it to Stephanie. She was a very rich almost ten-year-old, to the tune of £2,254,751 and 42 pence. The letter detailed where the assets had come from: property, vehicles, cash and life insurance. It was a little over three million dollars and it should keep Stephanie financially sound for life, if well invested...

“It’s all mine?” She asked quietly.

“Yes, Steph, it is.”

Then I grinned impishly.

“You can afford to swear now...”

Stephanie glared.

“...Probably blow the lot within a week, though!”

The young girl’s mouth dropped open!

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We moved onto other matters before things got too much for the young girl.

“I have fresh IDs for you all, Mindy – we noticed when you were stopped the other day for speeding,” Debbie explained with a grin. “You have a new licence in the name of Mindy Lizewski and we have British Passports for all of your team; including one for Stephanie Lizewski. They are clean and they should not tip off those you are pursuing...”

Debbie was cut off as her mobile beeped and she paused to check an email.

“Hailee Richards was seen leaving the country on a cross-channel ferry, late last night – our friends in the DGSI: Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure – are watching out for her and they will let us know the moment that they can identify her destination.”

“Thank you, Debbie. I think it is time for us to complete our arrangements for visiting France...”

That same time

Chicago, USA

CPD, District 21

Captain Marcus Williams was having a peaceful afternoon, having just finished his lunch when there was a knock on his door.

“Trudy – come in!”

Sergeant Trudy Platt pushed open the glass door; she was smirking and Marcus knew the look.

“I am *not* going to like this, am I?”

Trudy walked around the desk and she tapped the keyboard for a moment.

“Watch that...”

Marcus watched and then he grimaced and leaned in closer to the monitor, pausing the video for a moment. Then he sat back in his seat and looked up at Trudy.

“Holy crap!” Marcus breathed.

“That looked suspiciously like your daughter, Captain – she in England?”

“No point in denying it...”

“What’s with the red Police car, anyway?” Trudy enquired.

“Something to do with diplomatic protection, I think...” Marcus replied. “Nice BMW – shame about the bullet holes...”

“Saw those – not to mention the smashed rear window! Wasn’t the other girl, your granddaughter?”

“Yeah – looks like it...” Marcus grimaced.

“What would they be doing in the *front seats* of a Police car, anyway – plus the flashing blue lights and the siren? They were really moving and forcing their way through that London traffic...”

Marcus sank back into his chair and he covered his face with his hands.

“I honestly have no answer – who else has seen this?”

“No idea...”

‘What are you up to, Mindy?’ Marcus thought bitterly. ‘Whatever happens, you bring everybody back alive...’

Thursday, April 21st 2016

Early the following morning

The Spirit of Britain

Dover

We were heading for France.

The cross-channel ferry, *The Spirit of Britain*, had just departed the port of Dover and she now accelerated steadily out of the British port towards France and the French port of Calais, a mere twenty miles distant across the Strait of Dover.

“I feel sick!” Stephanie moaned as the ship rolled in the early morning swell.

“Well, stand down-wind then and try to get everything over the side,” Mindy chuckled.

“Your fault for stuffing your face at breakfast, this morning!” Anne-Marie laughed.

“It was amusing seeing Anne-Marie chuck up on the *Salty Swallow*; now I get to see my *other* sister chuck up!” Danny laughed without compassion.

“I’d forgotten about that,” Anne-Marie commented, then she had another thought. “Nobody ever did tell me what a ‘salty swallow’ was...”

Anne-Marie went silent for a moment and I saw Stephanie’s expression brighten and her sea-sickness was momentarily forgotten as she whispered something into her sister’s ear and then the younger girl’s eyes almost popped out of her skull and her face went very red. Stephanie was grinning at her sister’s obvious discomfort. It was a minute before the younger girl could actually speak and she glared up at her big sister.

“How do you even *know* about these things – it’s disgusting?” She exclaimed before she turned towards me with an accusing look. “How could you call a boat *that*?”

“Seemed a good idea at the time...” I muttered as I felt my own face warming up and I considered changing the name as soon as possible...

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While Stephanie went back to emptying her stomach over the ferry’s side, I considered the next few hours. The team was on their way to Paris. But we first had a ninety-minute boat ride to Calais to complete, followed by a three-hour drive, maybe four if we stopped every ten minutes for Anne-Marie to pee, before we would then reach Paris.

Debbie had provided us with details of a secure Safehouse in the French Capital, which we could use once we arrived.

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We would meet two further team members once we were in Paris – they were both busy arranging for transportation for us once we made it to Paris, through various back doors... I did not enquire as to what those were! Needless to say, it would be good to have two more professionals on the team. We seemed to work well together. Paris would be dangerous and if Waterloo had been anything to go by, we had our work cut out and the more people we had, the better; we were already one down.

My thoughts then turned to Hailee.

Where was she? Was she safe? Was she even still alive? I had to believe that she was, for her sake. I had never lost a member of my team, and Hailee was not to be the first one. We had found and rescued Anne-Marie against all the odds and I knew that we could do it again.

Stay safe Hailee...

That same time

***Eighty miles to the south
Dieppe, Northern France***

My head hurt.

I was slapped across the face again – that was what had woken me up in the first place. I opened my eyes and saw a man glaring down at me.

“You want food – move!” The man growled at me.

I looked around. I was in the back seat of a car; my hands were bound in front of me with two-sets of plastic ties – they were learning! The man reached over and cut them. I braced myself but felt the cold steel of a gun muzzle on my left temple. The point was made; I relaxed.

“Behave and we’ll treat you right – misbehave and...”

I felt the barrel of the pistol rap against the back of my head and it hurt, plus another point was made. The door was opened and I was pulled out into the parking lot of a McDonald’s restaurant. Either side of me was a man, another followed close behind.

I noticed the bulge of a pistol in each man’s jacket and it was obvious what might happen if I tried to escape. I just needed to bide my time – for the moment, at least. I had no idea where I was, but on looking around, I noticed cars driving on the right-hand-side of the road, instead of the left; so I was no longer in England. Then I saw signs in French on the restaurant and I could hear French being spoken.

Okay, I was in France – would Mindy and the others be able to find me? I began to gather intel – the men spoke with American accents; were they CIA? As we ate, I watched and took in everything around me.

“So, you fucking limp dicks, are you CIA?” I enquired between bites of my food.

The three men growled as one and I smirked.

“Bright little fucker, ain’t she?”

“Shame she’s gonna suffer... you a virgin or a slut?”

I scowled at that question and declined to answer.

“Probably a slut; a cock a day, I’d say!”

That comment received laughter which humiliated me to the very core of my being. The men had been with me since I had been taken, I assumed the day before – I had lost track of time. I remembered being grabbed and the prick of a needle in my neck – then nothing.

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I had awoken in a room, lying on a bed. I had kept my eyes closed and I had listened to my surroundings. I had heard movement around me, but nothing close by. I was still dressed, thank God; my feet were free, but my hands were secured with plastic ties.

I heard a door open and feet move towards me. They stopped beside the bed and I felt the man’s breath on me as he leant over to check on me. I reacted with the lightening reflexes that made me Petra. My feet came up and wrapped around the man’s neck as my eyes came open. I yanked my arms apart and snapped the plastic ties that bound my wrists. I punched the man’s lights out and seized his cell phone.

If nothing else, I had a great memory for numbers; especially phone numbers. I dialled the first one that came to mind...

“Please pick up, please pick up...”

“Hello...”

It was Mindy!

“Help!” Was all I could think of to say.

There was no preamble; Mindy got straight down to the problem in hand.

“Where are you?”

“I don’t know... I’m scared.”

“What happened?”

“They took me...”

“Focus!” Mindy ordered.

“I’m in a house...” Oh, God, I heard a noise from outside the room; I started to panic. “*They are coming!*”

The door opened and a man came in, he paused for a moment as he took in the scene before him with his colleague lying unconscious on the floor beside the bed and me on a cell phone standing over said colleague. He yelled out in anger before he made for me; I tried to fight, but I must have still been under the effects of whatever they had injected me with as I could not fight at my best. I missed the second man as he came into the room and he must have cracked me over the head with his gun; I screamed and fell to the floor, but kicked his feet out from under him as I went – the phone slipped from my hand and it went under the bed.

“Get off me you fucking bastards... I’ll fucking kill you...” I yelled at the men in sheer desperation.

I kept fighting, kicking out and punching the men as hard as I could; I tried to grab for a weapon, but I was hit again, hard enough to make me scream out again, then – nothing...

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That was all that I could remember before waking up in the back of that car with a headache. At least I had been able to get word out to Mindy that I was alive. If there was something that I could count on, it was *Fusion* coming to my aid.

It would just be a matter of time; how much, I had no idea: I would just have to hang on as long as possible.