

Sunday, August 28th, 2016

London, England

Trinity Square Gardens

The girl was running through the night.

She was running for her life.

Normally, the girl's skills would have allowed her to fight off and where necessary, kill, anybody who tried to threaten her life and well-being. That very life and well-being were, at that moment, at risk of being extinguished by her pursuers. The girl reached under her leather jacket and she pulled out a small compact pistol. She raised the Taurus PT111 and fired off four rounds before the slide locked back on the empty magazine. She threw the weapon at one of her pursuers striking him on the head but not hindering his advance in any way.

At the last moment, just before the pursuers reached the girl, she fell and skidded across the stone pathway before she rolled into the adjoining street and . . .

"What do we have here?" a deep voice boomed from above her.

"Oh, thank God . . ." the girl breathed out before she lost consciousness.

Four hours later

The Royal London Hospital

The nurse studied the young girl who had recently been brought in.

She had carried nothing to identify her; she was an enigma. The girl had been brought in by a Metropolitan Police Officer and his colleague. He had advised them that the girl had quite literally landed at his feet and he stated that he had heard many feet and possibly gunshots a minute or so before. Other than that, the girl was a mystery.

The reason for the girl passing out had soon become apparent once the nurse and a colleague had begun to undress her. Under the black leather jacket had been an empty pistol holster - not the sort of thing that you usually found a girl of her age wearing. As her T-shirt was removed, it was found to be soaked in blood - as a result, the T-shirt was quickly cut off. There, on the young girl's left side was a small puncture wound.

The wound was not fresh and it showed signs of infection. The nurse cleaned and dressed the wound as her colleague continued to remove the rest of the girl's clothing. She appeared to be about ten, probably eleven, years-old. From the smell of her clothing and her body odour, it was obvious that the girl had been living on the streets. She was also very undernourished and showing evidence of

dehydration. Once the nurses had her stripped, they checked over the rest of her body for any further injuries. But apart from plenty of scratches and bruises plus a few scabs, plus a long scar on her left side, there were no other treatable injuries visible externally.

After a bed-bath, the young girl was moved to a private room and allowed to rest. The nurse had noticed something during the bath and she sifted through several memos back at the nurses' station. There! The memo was very cryptic but it asked that if any child between the ages of approximately eight and sixteen were found with a small dagger tattoo behind the right ear, then the event was to be notified to a London phone number.

After fifteen minutes on the phone, being transferred around, the nurse finally spoke with a Commander Lawrence.

The following morning

Monday, August 29th

Scotland

VAS Thunderbolt

Keira had her arms buried up to the elbows in the *Twilight's* port engine.

"I think that's got it!" Chief Montgomery announced from the cockpit as the flight computer gave a green light to what had been a faulty sensor.

The bulkhead speaker behind them squawked into life.

"Scorpion!"

Keira pulled her hands out of the engine and fumbled for her radio.

"Yeah, Cassie?"

"Scorpion, scramble!" Cassie replied. "We need to be in London as soon as you can manage it."

Keira jumped down and wiped her hands off on some cotton waste before heading into Flight Operations. She opened a secured cabinet and pulled out a London flight plan.

"Okay - we'll need the ferry tank filled but we can get there in a little under two point five hours."

"Spook will have fuel and security primed for our arrival. PAX will be Nemesis - the Chief can come too as you'll be going into the City with me. See you in about an hour."

London Heliport

The landing was smooth and Spook was there to meet us.

He left the Chief with three able-bodied apes from MI5 for security and after Keira had changed out of her flight suit into smarter clothing, we both climbed into a black Range Rover Sentinel while Spook took the front passenger seat and ordered our driver to step on it. The seven-mile drive would take mere mortals almost forty-five minutes – we managed it in twenty-five with a little help from a siren and blue lights.

We had raced over London Bridge at almost seventy miles-per-hour!

The Royal London Hospital

The young girl had been moved into a private room in the secure wing of the hospital.

As they approached, a man in a dark suit stepped out of a doorway and stood his ground blocking the corridor. Spook smiled and they each held up their identification badges. Scorpion's was brand new, unlike those of Nemesis and Spook. The man showed his own Special Branch identification and he waved them into the room.

The girl was asleep. Her dark brown hair was long and loosely spread over her pillow. She appeared angelic to look at but considering everyone's own experiences and why they were there, they all had other ideas. Scorpion walked over to the girl's right side and gently eased back her right ear. Yes – the same tattoo Harper and the other girls had was there. Keira nodded at Nemesis as a nurse arrived with a doctor.

"Hello. I am Doctor Andrew Samson and this is Nurse Diane Watkins. Nurse Watkins was one of the nurses who first treated this young girl. She has not awoken since she was admitted; her body is fighting against several infections – but nothing serious. Evidence shows her to have been living on the streets. As soon as she awakes, she can leave. She needs several good meals to build up her body again and I will prescribe a daunting pile of medications for her to take. All in all, give her a month and she will be right as rain."

Nurse Watkins spoke up.

"Is the girl in trouble? Special Branch – you three dropping in within hours of her being admitted? That tattoo?"

"Have no fear, Nurse Watkins," Nemesis commented as she showed the nurse her identity card. "We are here to help. It is a matter of National Security and we must request your silence for the girl's protection. She has been badly mistreated by an organisation that no longer exists. That girl will get the best care and she will be looked after every second by people who care about her and who are aware of her circumstances."

"I believe you."

An hour later

The girl felt really sore but somehow, she felt relaxed.

She awoke to find herself looking at a pair of young women who sat in chairs beside her bed reading magazines and exchanging gossip. She tried to say something, but her throat only emitted a dry croak.

"Hi - I'm Cassie, let me get you a drink of water."

After a brief sip of water through a straw, the girl lay back and studied her new surroundings. It was a hospital - that was blatantly obvious. Her skilled eyes examined the two women and she took in the bulges under the jackets - left hip for one and under the shoulder for the other.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"Friends. What may we call you?"

"I'm Abigail - that's all you're getting for now."

"As I said, I'm Cassie, and this is Keira."

"What are you?"

The girls placed their identity cards onto the bed.

"MI5 - nice."

"We know what you are, Abigail. We know that you've had a crap childhood," Cassie offered.

"You think you know what I am?"

"You are a *Predator* - we've seen the dagger."

"So - you know about people like me?"

"Yes, we do, Abigail."

"You throw them all in cells, yet?"

"Why would we do that?"

"Where else might you put a ten-year-old killer?"

"You've been trained to do many bad things - not your fault. You deserve to have a life. We want to help you - if you'll let us."

Abigail glared up at Cassie and Keira.

"Well, we'll see you in the morning, then Abigail, and see how you're feeling tomorrow. Good night."

Abigail smiled sweetly without saying a word as they two women walked out of the door.

Just after eleven that night

Abigail had waited until final rounds before she had gently edged out of the bed and headed for the door.

She took a moment to peer at her clothing - or lack thereof. She was wearing a hospital gown, nothing more. Well, she'd worn less, she thought to herself. She edged the door open a few inches before peering out into the dark corridor - there was some illumination, a dozen or so yards away at what she presumed to be the Nurses' Station. The ten-year-old ran down the corridor before she skidded to a halt on her bare feet, just outside the light.

She carefully peered around the top of the desk. . .

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"Must be cold running around pretty-much naked," Cassie chuckled.

"Bet you'd like these," Keira suggested as she held up a set of clothes which Abigail thought appeared to be suspiciously close to her own sizes.

Abigail stood up and she glared at Cassie.

"How did you know?" she demanded angrily.

"Remember; we know about people like you. Do want to meet some more little girls, just like you?"

Abigail's angry glare softened and her shoulder's slumped. She had spent so long alone that she needed somebody. She needed to be with people. Even better, she needed to be with people like her. Those few days with Jamie and that other girl had been heaven, but that was gone - she couldn't even remember where or when it was; her memory was like mush. Despite her best attempts, she felt tears running down her cheeks. She was tired of running. She was tired of fighting. She just wanted to be safe. For some reason, she trusted the two women. She nodded and allowed herself to be led back to her room.

"Get dressed, honey, and we'll take you to somewhere that you can call home," Keira said as she laid out the new clothes on the bed: jeans, a T-shirt, socks, underwear, and a pair of trainers, plus a sweatshirt.

Abigail wiped away her tears and she ditched the hospital gown. She quickly pulled on the new clothes which fitted remarkably well. Once she was dressed, Abigail felt very vulnerable.

"Let's go home," Cassie suggested as she put an arm around the ten-year-old's shoulders.

The following morning

Tuesday, August 30th

Blairhoyle, Scotland

To avoid disturbing the entire household, Abigail was allowed to sleep on the sofa in the living room - under the watchful eye of Keira and Cassie who took turns watching the new girl.

Kaitlin was the first one to meet Abigail. Kaitlin entered the kitchen to find a strange girl eating a bowl of cereal. Kaitlin, being Kaitlin, she went with the flow and she circled the girl as she sat at the table in the breakfast room.

"You're another one, aren't you?" Kaitlin asked.

"Another what?" Abigail replied.

Kaitlin smiled.

"I'd say: Phase 2," Kaitlin suggested as she picked out a bowl and a spoon.

"Maybe," Abigail replied cagily.

"Okay. Pass me the Coco Pops, please."

Abigail complied, pushing over a jug of milk, too.

"Thanks - I'm Kaitlin. . ."

"Abigail."

Kaitlin concentrated on assembling her breakfast before cramming large spoonful's of soggy Coco Pops into her mouth, while studying Abigail as she herself ate. Abigail tried to ignore the younger girl but the brown eyes stared unrelentingly. She was about to call Kaitlin out when three more girls appeared. They both stopped dead at the sight of Abigail.

"A new girl. Hi, I'm Naomi."

"Harper."

"I'm Yvette."

"Hello."

"Her name is Abigail - that's all I know, so far," Kaitlin explained. "I'm planning to interrogate her further when I've finished eating,"

Abigail smiled.

"Abigail Wilde. I assume you are all *Predators*?"

"Yes - we were Phase 2," Naomi explained. "My little cousin, over there, she was Phase 1."

"You all live here?"

"No - Harper lives with her sister, Keira, in Edinburgh."

"I'm just here for some training - I live in Paris," Yvette added.

"You don't look too good," Kaitlin stated as she finished pouring the remnants of her chocolate milk directly from the bowl into her mouth - something which Cassie hated.

Kaitlin was right, Abigail was looking very pale.

Later that day

Abigail had been helped upstairs to a bed, where she had slept for a few hours.

She had awoken around lunchtime and she looked very miserable. She had a temperature and was feeling nauseous. Cassie was worried, so she had made a call and arranged for a Doctor to visit.

"You have a doctor who makes house calls?"

"Oh, yes, our Medic likes to travel," Cassie replied cryptically as a tall woman strolled into the bedroom.

"Good morning, Abigail, I am Doctor Catherine Bennett, but you may call me Cathy, or Doctor Bennett - whichever you feel most comfortable with."

"American?"

"Am I that obvious?"

"I like you."

"Pleased to hear it," Cathy chuckled before her demeanour changed to that of a professional doctor. "I understand you were in hospital after collapsing at the feet of a London police officer. The hospital noticed that you have been living on the streets - right?"

"Yes, err Doctor Bennett."

"You are a *Predator*?"

"You know about *Predators*?" Abigail asked incredulously.

"Oh, yes - very familiar with the likes of you, young lady."

"Can you help me?"

"Yes - let's check you over and see what's ailing you."

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Cathy left the bedroom, two hours later, closing the door behind her.

"Sorry it took so long, but I had to be certain. She's sleeping for the moment," Cathy explained to Cassie and Keira with a smile, but then her expression turned cold. "That girl has been raped. She is totally unaware of the event, fortunately. On examining the blood tests from the hospital documents, there are minute traces of GHB - gamma hydroxybutyric - in her blood. That little girl was sexually

assaulted by whomever she was with. The physical signs are there of an assault - probably within the past week."

"There's more?" Cassie was astounded by the revelation.

"Yes," Cathy went on. "Abigail has contracted genital herpes. That is why she is so weak. I have given her an anti-viral which should help reduce her symptoms while I go and find some drugs for her."

"How long for her to recover, fully?" Keira asked.

"Give it five days and she should be fine. She'll find it painful to use the bathroom but she'll be fine, physically at least. As for her mental state - I don't know. *Predators* are fragile enough without something like this at the age of ten."

"Thank you, for coming, Cathy," Cassie said. "We were lucky you were not too far away."

"Enjoying a nice getaway with Ryan before he has to return to his ship."

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"Thank you for the coffee, Alexandra," Ryan Bennett commented.

"You're very welcome, Ryan."

"Ah - the Doc returns!"

"With bad news," Alexandra noted.

Cathy explained the basics to Alexandra and Ryan - both of whom felt appalled by the news.

"That girl has been through too much, already, but for this?" Alexandra said.

"What sort of animal would do such a thing to a ten-year-old little girl?" Ryan seethed.

"A dead one," Cassie replied darkly.

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"What's happening with Abigail," Kaitlin asked, a few minutes later, with a worried expression on her face.

"Abigail is unwell, honey."

"What's wrong with her?" Kaitlin persisted, her voice increasing in volume.

"Honey, just let her rest, please," Cassie advised.

"But. . ."

"No buts, Kaitlin," Cassie cautioned and the young girl backed off.

Kaitlin stomped over to the couch and she slumped down, sulking. Her unhappy expression and worry was mirrored on the faces of Naomi, Harper, and Yvette.

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Later that night, Cassie awoke to hear screaming. She leapt out of her bed and ran out onto the landing. The screaming wasn't coming from the girl's room, next on the left, but from the next bedroom on the left - Abigail's room.

Cassie pushed open the door and flicked on the light. Abigail was having a nightmare, thrashing around in the bed, tears streaming down her face. Then, without warning, she sat bolt upright and her eyes opened as she came awake. The ten-year-old girl was shaking as Cassie sat down on the bed and tentatively placed an arm around the ex-predator's (was there such a thing as an ex-predator, Cassie thought) shoulders. Abigail turned her face into Cassie and then wrapped her arms around her and held her tightly, sobbing hard.

Considering what the girl had been through over the past few years, a breakdown was inevitable. To be honest, Cassie wasn't surprised and she had been dreading that it might have been Kaitlin or Naomi. The girl had nothing - she had been through hell. Cathy had mentioned PTSD: post-traumatic stress disorder. The disorder manifested itself in many different forms, often years after the triggering event.

Cassie stayed with Abigail for most of the night, keeping her calm.

Wednesday, August 31st

Mid-morning

"I heard screaming, last night."

"Yes, Naomi, you did."

"Abigail?"

Cassie nodded, her face a mask of worry.

"Abigail is having trouble coming to terms with her past. It's all coming back to her in a bad way. It's not a surprise - you Predators have experienced a lot of things that young children should never, ever, experience. It's called PTSD - post-traumatic stress disorder. I'm surprised that none of you have shown symptoms, although Kaitlin *did* cause a little damage to that BMW."

"A *little*? She wrecked the damn thing!" Naomi corrected.

Kaitlin growled - she hated to be reminded of *that night* - she saw it as a personal failure.

"I am reformed!" Kaitlin pointed out coldly.

Naomi started to laugh, as did Cassie.

"What did she wreck?" Yvette asked. "I need to hear this story."

Kaitlin just glowered at everybody.

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It was a difficult thing to try and explain to a ten-year-old little girl. She took it remarkably well - there were no tears, nothing.

"Are you sure that I . . . that I was . . . you know?"

"I'm sorry, Abigail," Cassie said. "But, yes, a man forced himself on you after drugging you."

"There's more?"

"You have a sexually transmitted disease - genital herpes. That is why you've felt so bad."

"But - I don't remember anything. . ."

"That's why he used the drugs."

"I'm going to get better?"

"Yes, you need to continue taking those anti-virals - Cathy said that you'd recover fully in a few days."

"May I be alone, please?"

"Of course, honey. I'll be down stairs if you need me."

It tore Cassie apart to leave the bedroom and close the door. Abigail could be heard sobbing hard as Cassie left.

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Abigail felt a little better that afternoon, so she was allowed out of bed. She ate a small lunch before joining the girls out in the garden. Cassie watched as four of the girls ran around like they did not have a care in the world. The fifth girl sat under a tree and she seemed to be enjoying the warm weather. Cassie headed back inside to get some cold drinks for the girls - as usual, they would all be sweating buckets.

Ten minutes later, Cassie heard running feet and Kaitlin burst into the kitchen.

"Cassie! Cassie!"

"Kaitlin! Please use your indoors voice."

Kaitlin rolled her eyes but reduced the volume - slightly.

"It's Abigail - she's . . . she's dying!"

Cassie and Keira bolted out of their chairs and they began to run after Kaitlin, out of the house and down towards the paddock.

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The scene was worse than either of them could ever have considered.

By 'dying', they had thought that Abigail was just hurt and that Kaitlin was overreacting - but no. When they arrived at the bottom of the paddock, they found Naomi and Harper kneeling on the ground either side of Abigail who was lying on her back with Yvette holding her head - the grass all around Abigail was stained with blood. Ominously, there was a very sharp kitchen knife lying on the grass and Naomi was missing her T-shirt which was wrapped very tightly around Abigail's left wrist. Harper was gripping the T-shirt tightly with both hands while Naomi was talking to Abigail, doing her best to keep the ten-year-old conscious.

Cassie reached for the pouch that she always carried in the small of her back - it was a small, but comprehensive, first-aid kit. Having the girls around had taught her, very quickly, that little *Predators* hurt themselves quite often, therefore, having a first-aid kit to hand had seemed prudent. She ripped it open and pulled out some gauze and a crepe bandage.

"Harper, hold the arm up above her head," Cassie directed as she pulled away the sodden T-shirt.

Cassie applied the gauze to the nasty-looking wound and she quickly wrapped the gauze bandage tightly around the wound and secure it with some tape.

"Keep the arm elevated, Harper."

Harper nodded while Cassie checked over Abigail for any other wounds - there were none - and she checked her pulse which was strong. The four girls appeared horrified by what they were witnessing. Keira scooped up the ten-year-old like she was nothing and carried her up to the house and back to her bed. The young girl was unconscious by the time she was tucked up in bed.

"That was bad - what's going on?" Harper demanded.

Cassie looked at Keira who nodded.

"Something bad happened to Abigail and I don't think it is something that we should spread about. Can you all trust me - I promise that when the time is right, Abigail will let you know what happened to her."

The four girls exchanged glances and they each nodded.

"Okay - we accept that," Naomi said. "Can one of us stay with her?"

"Of course. I don't think that she should be left alone - not even for a second," Keira replied.

"We take shifts - two hours, throughout the day and night," Naomi suggested.

"I'll take the first shift," Kaitlin directed.

That evening

Naomi pushed open the door to the bedroom.

Harper was on watch and she was reading a comic.

"Everything okay?" Naomi asked.

"She's still asleep - I'm sure she's been having nightmares, but she hasn't woken yet," Harper replied.

"I hope she's okay - I like her," Naomi commented.

"She's very gentle," Harper confirmed. "Bet Steph'll like her too."

"See you later. You want my comic?"

"Nah - got my book."

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Harper was very gloomy when she slunk onto the sofa to cuddle up with her sister.

"Thank you for being so caring, Harper," Keira said as she hugged the unhappy girl.

All the happiness had been sucked out of Blairhoyle. None of the girls had done so much as smile ever since 'it' happened. They all knew what Abigail had done - well, what she had tried to do, but nobody had actually used the s-word, just as Cassie didn't want to use the r-word for what had already happened to Abigail.

Only time would tell when it came to Abigail's mental scars healing.

Early the following morning

Thursday, September 1st

Abigail struggled to remember where she was.

Then she felt a stinging pain in her left wrist - it was bandaged; why? Then it hit her - two words: rape and suicide. She opened her eyes and in the dim light of the bedside lamp, she saw the shape of a young girl sitting in a chair.

"Hi, Abigail - it's Kaitlin."

"Hi. . ." Abigail said quietly.

Kaitlin stood up and came over to the bed.

"May I?"

"Please."

"You scared the fucking shit out of us!" Kaitlin growled.

"I'm sorry, Kaitlin - you've all been so good to me."

"Why?"

"Why did I try to kill myself?"

"Yes."

"Has anybody told you about what happened to me and why I fell ill?"

"No - Cassie said it was private."

"They told me that I was raped and that the bastard who raped me gave me a fucking STD!"

"STD?"

"Sexually transmitted disease."

Kaitlin did not know what to say; instead, she just reached out and held Abigail's hand. Abigail squeezed back and she began to cry. Kaitlin hugged the older girl until she fell back to sleep. Kaitlin wiped away her own tears and returned to her chair just as Cassie appeared.

"My watch," she said.

"Abigail woke up. She told me what happened to her. That bastard is going to fucking die - I'll fucking take him apart piece by fucking piece. . ."

"Take a ticket, pal!" Cassie replied darkly as she looked into the very dark and very dangerous eyes of a thoroughly pissed off *Predator*.

"I mean it, Cassie; this is no idle threat."

"I understand and we *will* get him."

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By breakfast, all the girls knew; Abigail having told them. The mood at Blairhoyle had turned distinctly cold and dark. Abigail was allowed into the kitchen to eat, but then she was packed off onto the sofa to watch TV.

"I'm sorry, to you all, for scaring everybody. I won't be doing anything like that again - it fucking hurt!" Abigail offered shyly.

"You want to talk - we're all here to listen," Harper said seriously.

"Thanks - I'm still getting used to having people around me that value me. I promise to talk before I do anything stupid."

"Maybe Kaitlin should follow that advice!" Naomi laughed for a moment before yelling out in pain. "Fucking ow!"

Kaitlin grinned innocently as her cousin rubbed her shoulder.

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Abigail's outlook on life grew steadily that afternoon.

Everybody went out of their way to make her feel welcome and wanted. She spent time chatting with her four new friends, plus a quiet hour with Cassie and Keira. That evening, they all enjoyed a barbeque out in the garden - there were no knives in evidence, just forks. Abigail actually thought that the missing knives was funny in a warped, *Predator* kind of way.

All five girls slept in the one bedroom, that night and after almost three hours of giggling, water fights, and generally rowdy behaviour, Cassie ordered them all to go to sleep or she would go get the Tasers out.

"She wouldn't," Abigail said.

"Oh, yeah," Kaitlin muttered. "Welcome to *our* world!"