

**Friday, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016**

**Blairhoyle, Scotland**

It was like somebody had just dropped a slab of meat into a pool where a pair of sharks lurked.

In this case, Abigail was the slab of meat. Stephanie and Electra flew at the girl and she was rapidly kicked to the floor where she was kicked and punched viciously. Cassie and Keira waded in, along with Harper and Naomi. It took all four of them to subdue the raging Stephanie and Electra despite the former only having one fully-functional wing.

"What the fuck, Stephanie!" Keira demanded as she pinned the ten-year-old girl.

A bruised and battered Abigail, with blood visible on her face, was helped back to her feet by Kaitlin. Abigail's face was just as contorted and angry as the faces of Stephanie and Electra.

"Easy, Steph," Cassie declared. "This is Abigail."

"Oh, I know who the fuck *she* is!" Stephanie growled. "I want to rip her fucking throat out, for a start. . ."

"That fucking whore gave me my goddamn scars," Electra growled just as menacingly. "She deserves to fucking die!"

"What!" Cassie exclaimed at the unexpected revelation - it was the first time that she had seen Electra in such a rage. "Is that true, Abigail - you slashed Electra and stabbed her?"

"Too damn right!" Abigail spat angrily. "That Yellow bitch stabbed me in the hand and then cut me with my own fucking knife. As for that bitch, Psyche; she took a leather strap to me and set me up to get raped."

Abigail bolted forwards and she attacked Stephanie. Her punch was nowhere near as strong as it used to be, thanks to her illness, but she was determined to make Psyche suffer. She kicked out and smiled as she heard growls of pain from her opponent, but just as she looked up into the furious face of Psyche, she paused and Abigail's own face was suddenly full of confusion. There was something about Psyche - her face, but more specifically, it was the eyes which had given her pause. Stephanie's gunmetal grey eyes were the very same as a set of brown ones that she was intimately familiar with. Her anger eased for a moment and then she smiled, surprising everybody.

"What the fuck are you smiling about, bitch?" Stephanie demanded in surprise as her opponent ceased her attack.

"I knew it - I fucking well knew it!" Abigail announced happily. "It was the eyes; your eyes are just like his."

"I . . . what?" Stephanie exclaimed, momentarily caught off guard by the comment.

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Alexandra had stayed in the kitchen to brief an appalled Mindy on Abigail's situation while Stephanie had, quite naturally, followed the sounds of excited chattering to find the girls and the new *Predator*. Nobody had had the remotest worry about the meeting.

Now, Alexandra and Mindy both ran through to see what all the commotion was about.

"What the fuck is going on?" demanded an angry voice.

Everybody turned to see Mindy and Alexandra standing just a few feet away but nobody responded. Alexandra made for Abigail and began to examine her face. Mindy turned on Stephanie and Electra.

"My question still stands," Mindy growled and Stephanie wilted.

"It was my fault - I just attacked. Abigail and us . . . well, we have a history. . ." Stephanie tried to explain before she was interrupted by Abigail.

"I gave Electra her scars. It was during an *Urban Predator* exercise - it was kill or be killed. We all did bad things to each other; I don't deserve. . ."

Abigail broke down into tears and she collapsed onto a chair. Stephanie and Electra just stood there, completely bewildered for a moment before Mindy seized hold of them both by the backs of their T-shirts and she hauled them into another room before spinning them both around to face her.

Mindy looked angrier than Stephanie had seen her in quite a while.

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"Would either of you care to explain that disgusting behaviour?"

"Not really," Stephanie muttered.

"We were shocked to see her," Electra began. "She was the last person we expected to see - both of us wished she was long dead. It was an automatic reflex - one which I never knew that I had. I've never felt so strongly about wanting to kill somebody. It's a feeling that I have no idea how to control."

Mindy nodded.

"Well, what do you have to say for yourself, Stephanie?"

Stephanie grimaced - full names meant trouble!

"I didn't mean to react like that, honest. Now I know how people feel when they meet *me* again - they all want to rip my throat out."

"As do I, right now," Mindy growled.

"I apologise for embarrassing you, Mum," Stephanie offered with a look of hope.

Mindy just shook her head and left the room without another word. Stephanie and Electra followed.

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"Are you alright, Abigail?" Mindy asked.

Abigail nodded as she threw virtual daggers at Stephanie and Electra with her eyes. Stephanie looked at Electra and the latter nodded.

"Abigail - can I call you Abigail?" Stephanie asked.

"It's my name."

"Can we talk - just the three of us?"

"You going to attack me again?"

"No - I promise," Stephanie replied as she looked up at Mindy who nodded.

Abigail breathed in deeply before she followed Stephanie and Electra into the other room - Stephanie closed the door, ominously. Then she reached out with her left hand and Abigail hesitantly grabbed hold of the hand with her own.

"I'm sorry," Stephanie said. "I just reacted; just like when we were back in Virginia. Please, come sit down and we can talk. Electra. . ."

"Hi, Abigail. We've never been properly introduced. I'm Electra."

"Good to meet you in better circumstances. You were a very brave little girl. You a *Predator* now?"

"My little trip to Virginia got me promoted."

"Well, Electra, that little trip didn't go all that well for me," Abigail pointed out and Stephanie grimaced.

"That isn't who I am now, Abigail. Back then, I was a murderous bitch, doing everything that I could to stay alive and keep ahead of the bastard instructors. Now, I have protection. Now, I have somebody to look after me and I have no need to resort to violence just to survive. I promise you, Abigail, I am a very different person."

"I believe you."

"Can't say the same for Electra, here - she's changed a lot; not necessarily in a good way, neither," Stephanie grinned.

"I see me as new and improved," Electra commented.

Abigail looked over at Stephanie and both exchanged a glance.

"Because of who you are, Fury, and because I respect you for what you are, I am going to tolerate you and I am going to treat you as an equal. I won't say that we're going to be friends - not yet - but neither am I going to rip your head off," Stephanie explained.

"I can accept that, Psyche - I am not ready to see you as a friend, sorry, but I will not act against you again. Err, Electra - you have a codename?"

"Yeah - Steph gave it to me back in the woods of Virginia and it stuck: Rigour."

"Rigour? That suits you - not bad, Psyche!" Abigail said before she turned pensive. "You have a brother?"

Stephanie frowned and she looked very sad for a moment.

"I *had* a brother - I killed him, along with my parents."

"Like hell, you did!" Abigail responded. "He's called Jamie, right, Jamie Reeman?"

Stephanie nodded, struggling to understand what she was being told - was it a cruel trick? But how could she know?"

"Well, Jamie Carter as he is right now."

Stephanie bolted up from her chair and made for the other room and Mindy.

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"Abigail says that my brother may still be alive - is that actually possible?"

Mindy looked stunned but not surprised which concerned Stephanie but she had no idea why.

"When did you last see him?" Stephanie asked Abigail who had followed Stephanie out of curiosity.

"I can't remember - I think it was a . . . I don't know."

"*Where* did you last see him?" Stephanie persisted.

"Is this the boy?" Mindy interrupted, passing a tablet over to Abigail.

Abigail studied the picture.

"He's older now, but the eyes, they are unmistakable."

Stephanie looked stunned as she grabbed the tablet and she began to scroll.

"You had his *Predator* file? You *knew* that my brother was alive? You *knew* that he became a *Predator*, like me? You *knew* that I didn't kill him? HOW COULD YOU?" Stephanie demanded - every question increasing in volume and anger until she was shouting.

"We had no confirmation that he was actually still alive. Yes, we knew that you didn't kill him. Yes, we knew that he became a *Predator*, like you."

Mindy felt really, really bad about having kept that crucial piece of information about Stephanie's brother, hidden, but it had been for good reason. Stephanie glared up at her mother and mentor.

"I really want to punch you, right now. I want to make you bleed. I want to make you suffer. But . . . but, I love you too much, Mum. However, you've just driven a knife into my gut and fucking twisted it. I am so mad at you. . ."

Mindy felt devastated.

"I know that you won't believe me, but I didn't do it because I am cold-hearted; I did it out of love - out of love for you."

"How?" Stephanie demanded as she continued to glare up at Mindy, tears of frustration and hurt running down her face.

"What if we had not been able to find him, or he had died?" Mindy tried. "I've seen what having somebody die twice does to a person . . . ask Chloe - and I did not want that for my little girl."

"I'm not your little girl. . . ." Stephanie replied angrily, almost out of reflex and Cassie saw the hurt in Mindy's eyes. Stephanie saw it too and she instantly recanted her comment. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean that. . ."

"Stephanie, I . . ."

"Please, Mindy - just give me some space."

Mindy watched as her daughter walked out of the room without even a backwards glance.

"I'm going for a walk," Mindy stated as headed out the door into the garden.

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### ***That same time***

### ***Chicago, Illinois***

### ***The United States of America***

Chloe picked up her cell and then looked at the name - she smiled.

"Hi, Steph - you looking for Josh?"

"No . . . I need to speak to you - please."

"Please? What's up, Steph?"

"Mindy and I have had a major falling out and I need some questions answered."

"What about?"

"I've just discovered that my brother may still be alive - at least, I found out that I didn't shoot him in the head when he was five. . ."

"Wow! That's amazing news," Chloe replied.

*"Yeah - only, I then found out that Mindy was aware of that fact, back in May. She betrayed me."*

"Now hold on, Steph - Mindy would never betray you."

*"But she has - how dare she withhold information like that! She says she did it out of love - bullshit, if you ask me."*

"Stephanie - you lost your brother once. How would you feel if you found out he was alive and then you ultimately found that he had died?"

*"That's what Mindy said - lame; she told me to ask you about that very subject."*

Chloe took a deep breath before she replied, knowing that she was opening old wounds.

"Stephanie - I will not sit here and let you insult my best friend. I will help you, but I will not listen to you pouring abuse on Mindy, understand?"

*"Sorry - I'm just wound up."*

"I know - that's allowed . . . to a point. Years ago, I thought Joshua was dead - his death hit me very hard and directly resulted in me becoming Shadow, as you know. Then, out of the blue, I found out he was alive - I had never felt so happy. But, just a few days later, I thought he had died protecting me. I was all but inconsolable. Mindy did her best as I cried on her shoulder, but you know what Mindy is like with emotions. I felt broken - for the second time. Believe me, Stephanie, you do not want to go through that."

*"I suppose not. Thank you - you've given me a lot to think about. Sorry for being bitchy about Mindy."*

"Any time, Stephanie - me and Josh will always be here for you."

*"Thanks."*

Stephanie hung up.

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Several miles away, another cell phone rang.

"Hi, Steph."

*"Hi."*

"Something's wrong. . ." SD replied.

*"You can always tell, can't you?"*

"I know you, Stephanie - I researched the fuck out of you, so I could kill you."

"Yeah - creepy!"

"Talk to me, Steph."

*"I just found out that my little brother might still be alive and that the woman who called herself my mother has known about him since May. She betrayed me, SD."*

Saoirse was genuinely shocked by her best friend's declaration. Ever since Stephanie had been shot, she and Mindy had bonded to an unthought of level. Saoirse had talked with Marcus and he had candidly explained that he was surprised to see Mindy relating to somebody so well and showing previously unseen emotions. Stephanie too had openly told her friend that Mindy was the best thing that had ever happened to her and that without Mindy, she would never have got through those weeks in hospital. Stephanie loved Mindy more than anything, so for her to say what she was, was very bad indeed.

"Stephanie, I think you're overreacting - Mindy would *never* betray you; she loves you dearly."

*"Maybe she does, but she had no right to hide my brother from me. She had NO FUCKING RIGHT!"*

Saoirse sighed as she held the phone away from her ear. Some tough love was required.

"Stephanie - have you stopped to think this through? Have you stopped to talk to Mindy, like mother and daughter? Did you go off half-cocked and tell her where to go? Did you tell the woman who sat sobbing in the ER for hours over your fucking broken body that she had betrayed you?"

"Maybe. . ."

"You are one ungrateful little bitch, Stephanie Lizewski!"

*"Thanks, SD."*

Saoirse was left staring at the disconnected phone.

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### ***Blairhoyle, Scotland***

Stephanie ran back into the living room.

"Where's my Mum?"

Cassie just pointed down the garden. Stephanie dashed out the door and sprinted down the garden, her eyes searching for Mindy. By the time, Stephanie had reached the bottom of the paddock, she was worried - she had to find Mindy, but where was she? Stephanie ran east along the bottom paddock.

"Mum!" she called out desperately.

Then she saw movement over by the trees and ran in that direction. She found Mindy sitting on the ground, glaring morosely into the

distance. Stephanie sank down and squirmed in between Mindy's legs, resting her head on Mindy's chest.

"Mum . . . I'm really sorry about what I said. I should never have said those things to you."

"You were right, Steph - I let you down."

"No - you did the right thing. I spoke with Chloe and then SD . . . both said I was stupid and I trust them both. I know you had your reasons and while I don't agree with them entirely, you are the adult and I am your daughter. I trust you to make the right decisions on my behalf. Will you let me be your little girl again?"

"Always, Stephanie. I know I'm not your mother, your real mother, and nobody could ever replace her," Mindy replied gently. "I'm doing the best I can and I apologise if I don't live up to your standards as a mother."

"I know - but you've been more of a mother to me than anybody has over the past year and you've brought me into your family and into your heart - I can only love you for doing that. Yes, in hindsight, I would not have wanted to have my brother die for a second time - the first time was hard enough. Now, I am just thankful that I only murdered my parents and not my little brother, too."

"I can never understand fully what you have been through, my little one, but I am here to help you get through your life. I love you very, very much, Stephanie, and nothing will ever change that."

"Thanks, for being there and helping me through everything. Saoirse said I was an ungrateful bitch and she was right. I never know when to keep my goddamn mouth shut."

"It's called growing up, honey."

"I know - it sucks, big time."

Stephanie squirmed a little more so that she could wrap her arms around Mindy and she squeezed.

"I love you very much, Mindy, and I am eternally grateful for everything that you do on my behalf."

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Mindy and Stephanie returned to the house and Stephanie felt a little sheepish as she entered. All eyes were on her as she sat down with Mindy.

"So, you two haven't killed each other, yet?" Cassie grinned.

"We've sorted out our differences," Mindy confirmed.

"I was being an ungrateful bitch," Stephanie added.

"As usual. . ." Electra muttered.

"What have I said, 'Lectra!" Stephanie cautioned.



Electra grinned and Stephanie scowled.

"So, who did I kill, if I didn't kill Jamie?" she asked.

"Probably some poor Yellow," Electra said darkly.

"Mayfair," Abigail suddenly stated. "I last saw them in Mayfair."

"What did you say?" Stephanie asked.

"Jamie and Shannon. I remember now - it was a house in Mayfair; they were living there."

Mindy looked over at Cassie and Keira.

"We can launch in two or three hours," Keira stated as she pulled out her mobile to call the Chief.

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### ***VAS Thunderbolt***

It was the first time for Stephanie and Abigail.

"This place is pretty cool," Abigail said.

"She's a sweet ride," Keira commented as she completed her pre-flight checks on *Twilight*.

"It better be," Stephanie laughed. "I don't want to see Abigail's breakfast!"

"Just so long as you keep your own breakfast to yourself," Abigail retorted.

"Do I need to shoot you both before we even board?" Mindy growled as she waved a bright-yellow Taser in their direction.

"Nah - we're fine," Stephanie replied with an innocent smile. "Let's go find our seats, Abigail."

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The flight was smooth as *Twilight* cut through the skies over the eastern counties of England. Cassie sat in the co-pilot's seat while Mindy sat in the back opposite the two girls.

"We're not going to start fighting, okay?" Stephanie tried for the umpteenth time.

Mindy smirked as she enjoyed her little game of intimidation.

"You know she's just trying to wind you up, don't you?" Abigail laughed as she rolled her eyes.

"Of course, I did," Stephanie retorted.

"Bullshit!" Abigail countered.

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## **London**

Commander Lawrence was on hand at the heliport with a car for them to borrow. Keira stayed with the helicopter while Cassie and Mindy headed into the city with Stephanie and Abigail. Cassie drove, much to Mindy's annoyance.

"I'm sorry, Mindy, but we all want to survive this drive!" Cassie laughed.

Mindy just fumed in the front passenger seat.

"Isn't that where you rode your motorcycle across the bonnet of a Police X5?" Stephanie queried.

"Fuck off!" Mindy growled.

Cassie chuckled and she ignored the angry glare from beside her. It wasn't long before they stopped where Abigail indicated.

"That house?" Mindy demanded.

"Yes, that house."

"You absolutely sure?"

"Yes, I'm absolutely bloody sure!"

"That house belongs to Cameron and Natasha," Mindy explained as she and Cassie climbed out of the vehicle. "You two stay."

"Mindy. . ." Stephanie began.

"Stay!"

"Woof!" Stephanie barked obediently.

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Stephanie watched as Mindy and Cassie drew their weapons before they headed inside the building. They were gone long enough that Stephanie began to consider going after them. Even Abigail was on the edge of her seat as she watched the house. Then, finally, after twenty minutes, Mindy reappeared with her pistol holstered and her face grim.

"He's dead," Abigail stated.

"Don't say that, please," Stephanie said as she climbed out to face Mindy who looked miserable.

"I'm sorry, Steph - there's nothing but bullet holes."

Stephanie bolted into the house, closely followed by Abigail.

"Jamie!"

"Jamie!"

"Jamie!"

"Jamie!"

The name echoed around the building as the two girls searched frantically. While Cassie stood guard, Mindy headed back inside. She found the two girls upstairs in one of the bedrooms. Stephanie was sitting on a bed. In her hands were a T-shirt and a sweatshirt. Both depicted a scene from Star Wars on the front. Both items of clothing were also child-sized.

"Jamie loved Star Wars," Stephanie said quietly. "Drove me round the bend with it. He would attack me with his toy lightsabre."

"Gather everything - we take it with us; I don't want to leave anything for the Police."

It didn't take long to gather the few personal belongings and items of clothing that obviously belonged to Jamie and the girl, Shannon. When done, Mindy carried the holdall downstairs and out to the car. Just as she had closed the boot, a voice called out.

"Armed Police, don't move!"

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They all froze.

"Keep your hands where we can see them!"

All four of them were pushed up against the wall of the house by a Police officer armed with an automatic weapon.

"Are you armed?"

"Yes," Mindy replied. "We have ID."

"Show it."

Cassie, Mindy, and Stephanie each reached for their identification, very slowly. An officer seized the three ID cards and a minute later a different voice spoke from close behind them.

"Now, what might the CIA and MI5 be doing here? Another question would be why a little girl has an MI5 ID; care to explain, anybody?"

"A very long story that you are not cleared for," Mindy explained.

"You may turn around and lower your hands, but no sudden moves, please."

They all turned to see that the armed Police officers had lowered their weapons and were covering the immediate area rather than the four of them. Only two people appeared interested in them, a tall older man and a slightly shorter, younger woman. The man wore a dark suit with a dark blue tie. The balding man was in his late fifties and he wore glasses. His beard was white and his face bore a worn expression as he studied Mindy.

"Commander Patrick Haig, SO15, and this is Sergeant Stefanie Woodward. Shall we talk inside?"

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The woman was dressed in a dark-coloured trouser suit and she had a professional air about her. Her eyes darted from Mindy to Cassie and then to the two girls as they all walked back inside the property. She handed back their ID cards once they were inside.

"We've been watching this building for two days - ever since a gun fight was reported, two nights ago. We hoped that somebody might return to give us a lead. Lo and behold, you lot appeared," Woodward explained after a nod from her boss.

"What might Counter Terrorism Command be wanting with what looks like a gang shooting," Cassie enquired.

Commander Haig laughed.

"I have had a lot on my plate over the past few weeks. A double murder, perpetrated by somebody with immense skill - they interrogated and tortured the victims prior to dispatching each one with a single gunshot to the head. No witnesses and no sounds of gunfire, just two very dead young women, one of whom was a drug mule who has links to a shady organisation called Scorpio. That organisation in turn has links to weapons trafficking among other things."

"Why are you telling us this?" Mindy asked.

"Because I think that you can help me."

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### ***Twilight***

"Did you believe him?" Stephanie asked.

"Yes - he appeared genuine," Mindy replied. "You may have noticed that he did not detain us."

"Yeah - that was weird," Abigail pointed out.

"We have some good intel and we will act upon it."

"I hope he's okay," Abigail almost whispered.

"He will be - he's my brother," Stephanie offered reassuringly.