

**Sunday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**London**

Electra felt both happy and safe for the very first time in many, many months.

She had her family, only, she missed her true family. Her true family was that in which she had striven to survive. She longed for her *Predator* family. Not that she would trade her blood relatives for anything. She missed everybody, especially Stephanie. Her brother was being as welcoming as he could be - although he was going a bit over the top at times. The breakfast in bed was a nice touch - at least on the first morning.

By the end of the fourth day, having somebody doing everything for her was getting too much and while she knew it was being done out of love, she had had enough.

"Simon!"

"Yes."

"Please - no more."

"What do you mean?"

"I may only be nine, but I can do some things for myself. I love everything that you are doing but it's gone a little far."

"Sorry - I was just. . ."

"I know."

Electra hugged her big brother tightly.

"I love you, Simon, I really do. Please ease up on the smothering."

"I will, Electra. I love you very much and I've missed having you around. It was like there was a hole. It's been worse not having Mum around and with Dad in intensive care."

"You are all I've thought about for years. I never thought that I would ever see any of you again."

"You've been through hell, as I understand it. It's just that you're my little sister."

Electra pulled off her T-shirt and the fourteen-year-old's eyes went wide as he took in the readily visible scars. His eyes followed the long scar that extended from the top left of his sister's torso down to the bottom right where it vanished into her underwear.

"I survived this - I can survive anything, Simon."

"Please - put your top back on. The attack on us was bad. I received two bullet wounds - both in my chest - which resulted in three months in hospital and many more months recovering. Mum took two bullets to the head. Dad took six bullets. Two skimmed his head and

that appears to be what put him into a coma. Otherwise, his wounds have healed and he is perfectly healthy. We have no idea why he is still in a coma."

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### ***That evening***

#### ***St Thomas' Hospital, London***

Electra struggled with her emotions as they entered the hospital.

She followed her brother and grandfather as they wound unerringly through the myriad of corridors along a route which they had been following for years. A nurse awaited them and she pushed open a door so they could enter. A man lay in the bed and Electra recognised him instantly. It was her father - an older version of the boy who stood beside her, an arm around her shoulders.

"Hi, Daddy. It's Electra. I'm back."

Electra held her father's lifeless hand hoping for some reaction but nothing came.

"Daddy. . ."

Electra's tears flooded down her face and she squeezed her father's hand in desperation. She sat there and she sobbed on and off for a significant amount of time - almost an hour - before her grandfather said it was time to go. Electra reluctantly released her father's hand and she took her brother's hand and the three of them walked out of the room . . . but then they froze.

"Electra."

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### ***Blairhoyle***

It was a relatively peaceful evening and Cassie was enjoying some valuable, quality time with her mother.

They used to spend time together a lot, but ever since Cassie had joined the fledgling *Vengeance*, time was not her friend. She had her training to maintain. She had *Vengeance* admin to complete. She had two little girls to keep on the straight and narrow - not an easy task. She also had a fiancé to entertain and hopefully maintain the secrecy of her nocturnal activities from him - the *Vengeance* related nocturnal activities, not the rampant sex which Cassie enjoyed several times a week.

Her mother was very busy, too. She had a house to maintain, not to mention feeding Cassie as well as the ever-hungry Naomi and Kaitlin. Alexandra also missed her husband who was deploying for ever-longer periods of time into the vastness of the world's oceans. Life as a naval wife was fraught with worry but Alexandra had been doing it for years and she was able to cope readily thanks to the support of

other wives and her daughters - one of whom was also away at sea, just like her husband. Cassie had never wanted to go to sea, unlike her elder sister. Cassie had her feet firmly on the ground, preferring life on land. As a young girl, Cassie had always enjoyed being on the water and the trips on Royal Navy vessels but her love was not the sea.

The mother and daughter conversation was suddenly halted as there came a thundering roar of feet from the stairs and then they heard a bitter voice.

"Oh, God . . . I'm scarred for life!" Craig yelled as he ran into the living room. "I think I'm gonna have to gouge my eyes out!"

Cassie grinned at the boy's horror.

"They're all dressed in pink and they're watching ponies on the TV - endless ponies!"

"They are girls, Craig," Alexandra pointed out.

"Yeah, right! It was Kaitlin's idea and Harper agreed to play along, then Naomi joined in. They tried to force me to watch the entire first five seasons of My Little Pony - Friendship is Magic and what there is of the sixth. I endured *eight* episodes and I can now name the Mane Six! I hate myself!"

"Poor Craig," Alexandra soothed with a huge grin.

"You *Predator* boys are real pansies," Cassie commented. "I thought you would have some balls."

"Harper said I needed to get in touch with my inner pony," Craig went on. "Kaitlin forced me to cuddle her Princess Twilight Sparkle."

"Forced?" Cassie asked.

"I don't like hurting them - I know what they've been through and while I could have fought my way out, I like those girls a lot - it's like having three little sisters."

"You're a good guy, Craig. Don't worry about hurting them - they may be little girls but believe me, they can take it. A few bruises never hurt anyone," Cassie said with a grin.

"It's good having you around, Craig," Alexandra offered. "This family is all girls - a boy would have been nice. I'm used to bringing up little girls and dealing with bras and periods, but you are a breath of fresh air. Never change, Craig."

"Oy, butthead!" Kaitlin called as she stuck her head into the living room - her favourite purple pony under her arm. "Season two is just about to start!"

Craig smirked.

"I think a little eight-year-old girl needs her little arse kicked," Craig suggested as he stood up and glared at said eight-year-old.

Kaitlin's eyes went wide and she fled with a little squeal. Craig ran after her and before long, Kaitlin's very loud giggles could be heard down in the living room.

Cassie smiled and just shook her head.

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### ***St Thomas' Hospital, London***

"Who said that?" Simon asked as he span around.

"Is that you, Electra?"

"How. . .?" Patrick questioned.

"Fuck, how!" Electra exclaimed as she ran over to her father's bed.

The man in the bed was smiling, his eyes open and he was looking directly at his daughter. Electra looked directly into the eyes which she had not seen for so long and she exploded into tears. Behind her, she could feel her brother as he stood close and she could hear him crying as they both held onto their father's hand.

"Daddy . . ." both youngsters said together.

"Nurse!" Patrick Haig called into the corridor.

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### ***The following morning***

***Monday, September 19<sup>th</sup>***

### ***Blairhoyle***

"Little girls!"

"What's up, Cassie?"

"You know, Miss Hannigan had a point!" Cassie grouched.

Alexandra laughed.

"First, they wouldn't get up. Then Kaitlin managed to flood the bathroom floor with water. Naomi slipped on the water and her skirt is soaked - she can't find her other skirt. Harper just encourages the other two girls to cause trouble making things worse, but at least she's dressed as I've got to get her to Edinburgh. Craig's lucky he went home last night."

Cassie sank down into a chair and buried her face in her hands.

"You were a little girl, not all that long ago, as I recall."

"But I never caused any trouble - I was always up and dressed for school," Cassie protested.

"Yes, you were always a good girl - bit timid, but a good girl."

"I wasn't timid!" Cassie bristled.

"You were scared stiff of your own shadow, Cassie."

Cassie scowled.

"That only happened just the once and now I'm never allowed to forget it!"

"Girls will be girls, Cassie."

"Tell me about it!"

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***That same morning***

***The town of Yeovil***  
***Southwest England***

Unfortunately, like many kids, his parents were separated.

The eleven-year-old boy had spent most of his young life with his mother, then the occasional weekend with his Dad. The boy's name was Jeremy Lai and he was a perfectly normal boy for his age - at least he thought so. The boy had no idea that over the next few weeks which he was spending with his father while his mother was in hospital, that he would endure the most amazing two weeks of his life as well as the scariest. He would face death. He would enter a secret community of vigilantes and he would watch them survive as they were hunted. Ultimately, he would watch them win.

So, where did his father come into the story. Well, he had been a Lieutenant in the British Army and he had flown Apache helicopters in combat. The man had been forced to leave the Army to look after his son when his ex-wife had fallen ill, but then she had been taken into hospital and he had custody of his son for the duration. As such, Trevor Lai had sought out suitable employment so he could support his son.

That morning, he had just completed a successful interview at what had once been Westland Helicopters but was now the UK arm of Leonardo-Finmeccanica after several mergers over the previous decades. His aim was to become a helicopter test pilot or to at least remain involved in military helicopter development.

"Trevor?"

Trevor stopped in the street - his mind had been very focussed on his interview - and he turned to see a familiar face.

"Keira!"

"What are you doing here?" Keira Sharp asked the man.

"I'm just on my way back from a job interview at the works."

"It went well?"

"I think so - fancy a coffee?"

"Why not."

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"You still flying for the Navy?" Trevor asked his friend.

"No - I retired a few months back to look after my little sister. You still flying Apaches?"

"No - I retired a few months back to look after my son while my ex-wife is in hospital."

"Something bad?"

"Cancer - we don't know how bad, yet."

"I'm sorry."

"So am I - it's hard on Jeremy but he's a strong lad."

"You looking for a job in helicopters, huh?" Keira asked. "I might have something which would be right up your street."

"That would be nice! 'Right up my street' would be an armed helicopter which I could use to blast the crap out of those who wanted to harm our country."

"Funny you should say that. . ."

After some more catching up, the two friends went their own way.

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***Three days later***

***Thursday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>***

***Counter Terrorism Command Headquarters***

***An undisclosed location, London***

***10:00***

"Commander!"

Commander Patrick Haig looked up from his desk as his door flew open.

"What is it, Sergeant," he asked testily.

"This just came over the wire."

Sergeant Woodward pushed a piece of paper onto her boss' desk. Commander Haig picked it up and he read the neat paragraphs of printed text.

"Shit!"

Patrick Haig abandoned his desk and he bolted out of his office and down three flights of stairs before he reached his car. He raced out

of the parking garage and he sped home as fast as his wheels would take him.

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"Hi, Grandpa. . ."

"Phone - the one Mindy gave you; I need to call *Vengeance*, now!"

Electra dug into her pocket, her face full of confusion, and she produced the mobile which Mindy had given her. She pressed her finger onto the button which activated the phone and she selected the *Vengeance* HQ from the contacts. She then passed the phone to her grandfather.

"Speak!" came the response from the other end.

"This is Commander Haig - they're coming for you! You have four hours at most, then they will deploy and take your facilities and assets."

"*I need a codeword, Commander,*" Eric replied as he followed protocol.

"Ratchet Six!" the Commander offered impatiently.

"*Thank you, Commander - we will be in touch. Keep that mobile and Rigour safe.*"

The mobile disconnected.

"What is it?" Electra asked - her expression cold.

"*Vengeance* is in big trouble."

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***Vengeance Command Centre***  
***Edinburgh, Scotland***

***10:25***

The klaxon and the red strobe lights attracted everybody's attention, instantly.

"*Code Alpha! Code Alpha!*"

Everybody froze as Eric's voice echoed around the facility. But then there was organised but frantic activity as everybody followed their set tasks. Prepacked 'Go Bags' were pulled out of cupboards and congregated together ready for transport. Combat suits were packed in readily available, made-for-the-task, packs. Personal weapons were stowed in the same packs. Pre-packaged weapon packs were placed aboard Sabre and Scimitar along with the Go Bags and freshly packed personal equipment.

Cameron and Natasha finished clearing and destroying any paperwork before they joined Cassie at the vehicles. Natasha would go with Cassie to fetch the two girls and Craig from their school while

Cameron and Q would race into Edinburgh to get Harper. Eric had sent the same alert to Jasper who was busy scrambling his own family as well as down to Keira and David. Cassie had called Alexandra who was heading to collect Craig's mother, Amy.

The final person to leave the facility was Eric. The tech wiz began a data dump - all the data on their servers was already replicated across the Atlantic, so he began a secure data wipe which would take two hours to complete. As a backup, he set the timer on eighteen incendiary charges which would reduce the servers to molten slag in just forty seconds at the end of those two hours - or if anybody came within twenty feet of the data core.

Anything else which was classified but which they could not take with them would be destroyed in place and was gathered in the courtyard and liberally covered with powdered Thermite before two timed incendiary charges were laid in place. The paper and electronic files which were stored in the Safehouses and at *Thunderbolt* were destroyed remotely. There were, however, certain parts of *Vengeance* which were unknown to HMG - Mindy had insisted on it.

Four very surprised and worried kids were collected from school - a family emergency - and whisked off to their RV point in southern Scotland.

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***Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton***  
***Southwest England***

***Hanger 8***

***14:10***

Lieutenant Peakes was the Duty Officer and he ran towards the hanger with four, armed, Royal Navy Regulators hot on his heels.

He knew he was too late, even before the rating hauled open the steel access door. The sound of gas-turbines spinning up to take off power was readily audible as was the sound of the rapidly accelerating rotor blades. The five sailors watched as the helicopter rose a foot into the air, raising its undercarriage and moving forwards out into the open air. The Royal Naval Air Station's Executive Officer arrived in the hanger just as the armed helicopter increased power and accelerated for a fast take off.

"Lieutenant!" the Commander called out. "Is that helicopter armed and fully fuelled?"

"As per the training exercise you ordered two hours ago, sir - we had no idea it would bug out on us."

"You were ordered to prevent the launch, Lieutenant!"

"We got here too late, sir - I mislaid my cap."



The Commander chuckled as he looked at the rapidly disappearing aircraft.

"Good luck, Scorpion."

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### **Leaderfoot**

#### **Scottish Borders**

**14:40**

It was Cassie who went ballistic and pressed Jasper to a wall, her pistol in his carotid artery.

"What the fuck is going on - *tell me!*"

"I have no idea, Cassie. . ."

"Pull the other one, it's got fucking bells on!" Cassie growled as she pushed the muzzle of the pistol in deeper threatening to cut off the man's blood flow to the brain.

"I received the order just forty minutes ago," an ashen-faced Jasper said in his defence. "I came with you before I knew that they were coming after you."

"Why has HMG thrown us to the wolves?" Natasha demanded.

The interrogation was interrupted by Cameron's mobile beeping. He answered it.

"Challenge: Echo One Seven!" Cameron barked down the phone.

"*Red One Niner*," came the valid response which was *not* a duress code.

"What the fuck is going on, Spook?"

"*From what I can tell, I don't think they liked what you did to Fraser. I have been ordered to have you turn yourselves in for the duration.*"

"Duration?"

"*They didn't say. Does Cassie have a pistol to Jasper's throat?*"

"What makes you think that?" Cameron asked a little dumbfounded.

"*I considered that you all might see Jasper as the enemy . . . and Cassie seems the type. Anyway, Jasper is innocent - apparently, the powers that be didn't trust him to give you all up. Not sure they really trust me, neither.*"

At a wave from Cameron, Cassie took her pistol out of Jasper's throat and she released the man.

"I'm sorry, Jasper."

"That's okay, Cassie - I would have reacted the same way."

"We'd better go see if the kids have killed each other yet!" Cassie smiled.

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***Compton Abbas Airfield***

***Two nautical miles southeast of Shaftesbury***

**19:00**

He had no idea if he was even remotely doing the right thing.

The phone call had been cryptic but he had been intrigued. Intrigued enough to drive for an hour with his young son in tow, before catching a taxi from Shaftesbury town centre. Intrigued enough to be standing in the driving rain on the edge of a grass airfield at the top of a hill in the middle of nowhere.

"Dad - what are we doing here?"

"I dread to think. I trust Keira and she offered me a job with a very attractive pay packet attached."

"Doing what?"

"Flying, I hope."

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Four minutes later, the unmistakeable sound of a helicopter approached the airfield and Trevor Lai stepped out of a small shelter to stare wide-eyed at what emerged out of the rain.

The helicopter was sleek and painted in a dark grey hue. The machine hovered two feet off the ground, undercarriage neatly stowed. What attracted his attention were the weapons' pylons hanging from the helicopter - it was no ordinary helicopter. He recognised it as an Agusta-Westland AW109LUH helicopter with some significant military-based customisations.

The helicopter slid sideways and moved around his car, pivoting to keep the nose pointed directly at Trevor. Then the wheels dropped and the aircraft settled down onto the grass forty feet away - the rotors continued to spin at speed. A door slid open on the port side and a form jumped down. The man was wearing a dark grey flight suit and a black flight helmet. At the man's hip, was a large-framed automatic pistol. The man waved them both forwards and then pointed into the cabin of the armed helicopter.

Trevor moved forwards, holding on tightly to his son. The man waved them both aboard, lifting Jeremy up and helping him aboard. The moment the man climbed aboard, he slammed the door and spoke into his headset. Immediately, the helicopter began to move forwards and gain altitude very rapidly before turning to starboard and coming around onto a new course. Trevor and Jeremy were directed to a pair of seats upholstered in a sumptuous dark grey leather. Trevor quickly strapped himself in and then assisted his son. The man in

the flight suit sat opposite them for a couple of minutes before he passed over a pair of wired communications headsets and pointed to the intercom jacks in the overhead.

"Hi, Trevor!" came a very familiar voice from the cockpit where a hand was raised in welcome.

"Hi, Keira - what is this?" Trevor asked cautiously.

"We are *Vengeance* and this is *Twilight*."

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### ***Leaderfoot***

#### ***Scottish Borders***

**19:00**

Mindy had been very thorough in her preparations.

There were stacks of pre-packaged equipment which would be essential for keeping *Vengeance* operational until the fallout with Her Majesty's Government was worked out. Packs of machineguns, pistols, and explosives were securely packaged, ready for instant transport. As well as personal weapons and heavier man-portable weaponry, there were missiles, rockets, and cannon pods for the helicopters. Crates of spare parts, weapon pylons, and weapon wings. It was all there in perfect condition.

The only problem was loading all the kit onto the trucks which Mindy had also thought to provide.

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### ***A field***

#### ***East of Tisbury***

**19:25**

The helicopter was surrounded on three sides by tall trees.

*Twilight* was quiet - rotors still. Inside, safe from the wind and rain, Keira grinned as Trevor studied a pack of documents which his friend had given him. Technical documentation, schematics, specifications. It was all there and related to another helicopter which Trevor instantly recognised to be a McDonnell Douglas Helicopters MD 530F Cayuse Warrior with various upgrades and modifications.

"What are you selling me?"

"That is *Scourge* - you are *Raptor*. Chief?"

The Chief passed over a large crew bag which Trevor took and he opened it up to find A flight helmet, a flight suit, flying boots, and a flak jacket similar to that worn by his friend. The flight suit bore a patch over the left breast: **VENGEANCE** and **RAPTOR** were embroidered above and below a set of Army wings.

'Damn!' Trevor thought as he looked down at the incredulous expression on his son's face.

"You want me to fly for Vengeance?"

Trevor knew who they were but he had no idea that they had armed helicopters.

"We are in big trouble, right now. We need to recover our other helicopter and we need another pilot. After our meeting, the other day, you were cleared as suitable. Now, we really need you, Trevor."

"Where is this helicopter?"

"Now, that is the big problem . . . it's at Boscombe Down."

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"You want to steal a helicopter from a secure Government airfield?!"

"It is kind of our helicopter and it will be a quick in and out."

"I . . . Christ!"

"Time is against us, Trevor," Keira pointed out.

"Boscombe Down?"

"Yep."

"Fucking MoD Boscombe Down?"

"Yep."

"They catch us, they'll throw away the key."

"Yep."

"They'll shoot us on sight."

"Yep."

"It's important we get that helicopter?"

"Yep."

"Really crucial, lives are at risk, type situation?"

"Yep."

"Should I survive this madness, would I be the pilot of said helicopter?"

"Yep."

"Okay, we're in," Jeremy piped up from beneath an oversized flight helmet and his father shrugged.

"Yep," Trevor confirmed.

**19:45**

"So, Scorpion - the plan?" Raptor prompted as he sat in the co-pilot's seat, wearing his new flight suit, flying boots, flight helmet, and flak jacket with weapons.

"A Wildcat helicopter is inbound to Boscombe and it has permission to land directly outside Shelter 19 which just so happens to house *Scourge*. Now, due to an admin mix-up, *Scourge* is fully fuelled and armed."

"An 'admin mix-up'?"

"We have friends in low places."

"Do I assume that we are that Wildcat helicopter?"

"We are. A Wildcat helicopter was injected into the schedule and we are expected. We expect to have twenty minutes to pre-flight and get the hell out of dodge."

"Will they target us?"

"I hope not or it'll be a very short trip back to the ground. They have multiple Rapier batteries, although we expect them to be at low readiness. The bigger problem is the mobile Starstreak system which has a higher readiness - they have two units at the airfield."

"Countermeasures on *Scourge* and *Twilight*?"

"HIDAS 15 will provide laser warning, hostile fire indication, directional infrared countermeasures, and radio frequency countermeasures."

"You've read the manual!" Raptor laughed. "Just testing."

The rest of the flight was in silence as they entered the approach pattern for MoD Boscombe Down. Scorpion responded to the challenge and directions from the tower as they were acknowledged and directed in for a landing in the driving rain close to the shelter which held *Scourge*. Jeremy was seated in the back of the helicopter, wearing a flak jacket, under the watchful eyes of the Chief.

The decent was quick and within minutes, the undercarriage oleos were compressing as they landed on the hardstanding outside Shelter 19.

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## ***Scottish Borders***

**19:45**

Many miles to the northeast, the three trucks thundered through the night down the A68.

Each Bedford TM 6-6 truck roared as the 8.2-litre engines powered over eight-tonnes of cargo each, southbound and into England. Along

with them came a precious human cargo spread out ahead and behind the convoy of precious supplies.