

**PREVIOUSLY
ON
VENGEANCE**

Thursday, October 6th, 2016

Southern England

Ajax ran forwards, but she was punched in the face for her trouble.

Despite that, she fought back gallantly while attempting to help her friend escape. Prowl and Glide were running over, slipping in the mud as the damaged X5 slid to a halt beside Polaris, knocking Ajax to the ground. Polaris realised that she could not escape, and that single realisation sent a wave of fear flooding through her body as she was thrust into the vehicle. Just as the door was closing on her, she yelled out in borderline hysteria.

"HELP ME!"

Friday, October 7th, 2016

An unknown location

Somewhere in the United Kingdom

"Wakey, wakey, you scratty little bitch!"

Harper snapped awake in an instant and she sat up, or she tried to, her head hurt. She lay back on what appeared to be a bare mattress. She looked around and into the eyes of a ferocious looking girl who must have been in her late teens. The ten-year-old struggled to remember where she was and why she was there. It took only a second to realise that her combat suit was gone, and she wore only a T-shirt and her boy-shorts.

Then she remembered the trip back in the BMW 4x4.

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"Glad you could join us," a voice had chuckled as the vehicle had bounced around savagely in its efforts to escape.

Bullets were striking the windscreen and Polaris could see Glide attempting to shoot out the armoured glazing - it was futile, Polaris knew. She also knew that the team would protect the Prince and the Princess over one of their own. She felt the fear inside her and the loss of control over her life.

"You have no idea *who* you've pissed off!" she growled through her electronic sound synthesizer which disguised her voice.

"Enough of that shit," a voice declared, and Polaris was shocked to find her mask being yanked off her head. "Shock? You're wondering why I wasn't jolted by a surge of electricity."

The man was right, Harper was shocked.

"We know your little tricks - we know what you are. Okay, I shall explain," the man said as he held up a gloved hand. "Rubber glove and an over-glove with metal thread embedded throughout - I'm earthed, you little fuck."

"You have no idea. . ."

"Yeah, I know - bit younger than I thought."

"You going to rape me?" Harper asked, a little worried at the potential response.

The man laughed, a deep belly laugh.

"You are way too young, lassie - maybe in another twelve years. . ."

"In twelve minutes, you will be dead," Harper responded with all the menace she could muster.

"You are getting tiresome, young lady."

Harper braced up as she felt something sharp pushed against her neck and then . . . oblivion.

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Harper then realised that her hands were secured in front of her - plastic zip-ties *and* rigid cuffs.

"Guess you're not taking any chances, huh?" Harper tried as she stood up.

The smack was both loud and very, very painful. Harper fell to the floor, her head reeling from the impact and her vision blurred for an instant but before she could regain her feet, another blow came down, and another.

Harper's vision faded into blackness.

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Harper had no idea how much time had passed, but she was hungry and thirsty - and very cold.

The room had been warm, the last time she was awake - now it was Baltic. She shivered in her underwear on the threadbare mattress. She needed warmth, but she also needed something else, so she stood up, her head pounding. She pounded her fists on the wooden door to her makeshift cell.

"Hey!" she shouted as loud as she could.

There was no response.

"Hey! I need to wee! I need the loo!"

Harper began to feel very uncomfortable - she really did need to use the toilet - but nobody came. Finally, Harper dejectedly struggled to pull down her underwear and with no other choice, she squatted down in a corner and she released her bladder. It was a major effort to pull up her underwear, but she managed it and she huddled on the mattress trying to keep warm as she shivered. Then she heard something - it was a key in the door to her room/cell. She turned over and sat up. It was the girl again and she held what appeared to be a dog bowl and a small cup. The items were placed down on the floor and the girl turned to leave.

"Your food, wretch!"

The bowl was plastic and contained something which neither looked like food, nor smelt like food.

"What is it?" Harper demanded.

"Don't eat it - I don't care."

With that, the girl left the room, slamming the door behind her and locking it. Harper explored the gifts. The plastic cup held water, of which she eagerly drank half - it was just as cold as the room. The food which sat in the dog

bowl looked just like dog food, although to be brutally honest, even dog food looked more appetising. Nevertheless, the *Predator* inside of her was in charge and she knew that she needed to keep her strength up if she was to make her escape. She pushed a finger into the dark substance - it felt like mince and was stone cold. She knew what they were doing - it was psychological; they were wearing her down prior to interrogation. Only, she was not about to betray her friends and her family - she would hold out as long as her training and conditioning would allow her.

With a grimace, she scooped out some of the congealed meat and she forced herself to chew and swallow the horrible substance.

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Another bowl of congealed food appeared a while later.

Nobody had talked to her, nobody had even acknowledged her existence, except for the girl delivering the stuff that was supposed to be food. Harper was still shivering with the cold and she felt thoroughly miserable. She could smell her own urine over in the corner and the smell exposed her weakness. She could do nothing to make good her escape, but she needed to keep her strength up, so again, she forced down the cold food and she drank more of the water which was not exactly fresh from a mountain spring. The room began to get dark, not long after the food came. The temperature was dropping too, and the stone floor was becoming colder under Harper's bare feet and legs, so she moved onto the mattress which was barely a degree warmer.

The nine-year-old focussed her mind on her *Predator* training and she allowed herself to be drawn back into that mindset as she believed that it might help her to survive. As the darkness grew, Harper found herself plunged into total darkness and she lay down on the mattress, dejectedly shivering as she struggled to keep warm. She tried to listen, to hear anything which might help her, or give her hope, but there was nothing - she was very much alone. She missed her sister. She missed her friends. She missed her family.

Despite her bravery and courage, she could not prevent the tears which welled up in her eyes and overflowed down her frozen cheeks onto her mattress.

The following morning

Saturday, October 8th

It was dark when they came for her and for Harper it was a very rude awakening as she heard the door opening and then hands on her as she was yanked to her feet.

The cold had deadened her senses, slowing her reactions. She tried to fight, but she could not. The disorientation was fogging her mind and for several moments she did not even realise that she was on her feet and being shoved out of her cell. There was a strong hand around her left upper arm which dragged her along. Her bare feet were frozen as she stumbled along a corridor with a stone floor that had to be only a few degrees above zero. Finally, after what seemed like quite a distance, they stopped, and Harper sagged against a stone wall, shivering despite the brisk movements. Then, without warning, Harper's world was turned upside down as her T-shirt was ripped from her along with her underwear and she fell, completely naked, to the stonework that formed the floor.

The young girl found herself unceremoniously yanked to her feet and then pushed out of a door and she screamed as freezing cold water soaked her already

freezing skin within seconds. The water brought her very quickly to her senses and her shivering increased. She was outside in the pouring rain and it was still very dark. A bright light shone on her, dazzling the girl so she could not see anything which might be called intelligence for an escape. Then, despite the fact she was soaking wet, a hand shoved her hard in the chest. Harper could do nothing as her hands were still bound in front of her, so she fell backwards, landing in freezing cold mud which splashed all over her. Harper screamed as the cold mud hit her and the intense shivering began to move towards hyperventilation. Her mind was losing focus and she could not think - she just lay there in the mud and she thought of her sister and how much she wanted to be with her.

Then the light was shone directly into her eyes and Harper screamed again as she was yanked to her feet by her bound wrists. Harper was losing control of her body as it shook violently with the cold. Her feet squidged through the mud and the feeling between her toes felt horrible to the girl. She was dragged through more mud and then onto some rough concrete before she suddenly screamed again as a torrent of freezing cold water struck her from what had to be a hosepipe, despite the torrential rain which was still pummeling the naked girl. Thankfully, the mud was blasted off her body. Harper almost choked on the water as it was aimed directly at her face. It moved into her hair and then across her back.

The shivering was unbelievable as she was dragged across the same rough concrete and then she suddenly felt a wave of warmth as she was led back inside before she was thrown into a room with a lino floor and which stank of tobacco. Her two items of clothing were thrown in after her and then the door was slammed shut. Harper struggled to open her eyes as the room was lit by a very bright strip light which was dazzling to the disorientated girl. However, the most important thing was that the room was heated - extremely well - and it did not take very long for the frozen Harper to regain feeling in her extremities and for her skin to dry. She pulled on her meagre clothing and sat on the floor close to the radiator which emitted copious amounts of heat for the girl to enjoy.

Once her mind had thawed, the *Predator* in her queried the rapid shift between cold and heat and the interceding abuse - she was being prepared for an interrogation.

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The door opened, and Harper glared at the man who entered the room - it was the man from the BMW - and she noticed that the room had a number on the door: 14.

"Please get up off the floor, young Harper - we do have a chair for you," the man suggested.

Harper could see no reason for not cooperating - at least for the moment - so she stood up and sat down on the chair which faced another identical chair across a small table. The man took the other chair and he placed a cardboard file of paperwork beside him.

"Would you like a drink? Maybe some food?" the man asked as he reached across the table and he removed the handcuffs along with the flexicuffs.

Harper knew the tactics - she had read the same book: 'Interrogation 101'. The man was chatty, obviously trying to be her 'friend' and wanting to help her. He had a thick folder full of 'stuff', alluding to the fact that he knew everything, so why hold back from answering the questions? A part of 'Interrogation 101' was identifying the techniques being used as there was a

method to defeat each technique. There was a problem; the man knew what she was, so she assumed he knew her training - 'Hold on!' Harper thought to herself. 'Don't assume anything!'

"You've not asked me why you are here?" the man began.

"I figured that you'd tell me if you want me to know," Harper replied as nonchalantly as she could.

"Just so I have the correct information, could you provide me your full name?"

"Harper Sharp."

"Date of birth?"

"A lady never gives out her age," Harper replied facetiously.

"Come now, Harper, you are nine-years-old - not quite a lady, I think."

"March 19th, 2007."

"I've put you down as 'female' - you don't see yourself as something different; I have to ask nowadays in this politically correct climate."

Harper was getting annoyed - the guy was fucking around with her.

"I was born a girl and I'm still a fucking girl - I was naked just a few minutes ago, so I'm sure somebody can confirm that I have a sodding snatch!"

"No need for that language, young Harper - now, your parents. . ."

"Go fuck yourself!"

"Okay - touchy subject; we'll come back to them."

"You live with your sister, I believe, a Keira Sharp. She was a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy - she gave up her commission to look after you, I believe."

Harper was annoyed at how much the man had on her.

"Tell me, Polaris, where are your friends right now?"

There it was. Straight out in the open without fanfare; he was digging for information about *Vengeance*. Harper clammed up; she was answering no more questions.

"We were doing so well, Harper."

The door opened, and a tray was brought in and placed before her by the girl. She groaned. The man stood up.

"I'll take my leave and come back in a little while - enjoy the food."

With that, the man was gone with the girl and the door was closed - and locked. Harper groaned again. The tray held a plate which held a freshly made cheeseburger and a pile of steaming chips - there was even a container with what looked like Ketchup. The cold can of Pepsi Max was also very appealing. What did she have to lose? The food would give her the energy she needed to resist their interrogation for as long as was humanly possible. Harper gave in and she began to eat the burger - it tasted so good! She drank the Pepsi Max and dipped her chips into the Ketchup, savouring every bite, not knowing when she might enjoy something so nice again.

The man returned as promised, just as Harper had finished eating - he was not smiling any longer.

"Enjoy the food, you little bitch?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Right, time to demonstrate what happens should you fail to follow instructions, or you fail to answer my questions to my satisfaction. I believe you know Instructor Morris."

Harper's smirk vanished in a millisecond as a large woman stepped into the room which suddenly went very cold all of a sudden.

"Well, if it isn't 'The Wicked Witch of the West'!" Harper growled with forced bravado.

"Well, if it isn't little Harper - you've grown; more for me to play with," Sophie Morris chuckled.

For a moment, Harper forced a grin, but fear soon overtook her. Morris was a face from her past; one which she hated - one which scared the girl to her core and one which she had hoped had died with *Urban Predator*. Sophie Morris stepped up to the table and she grabbed hold of Harper's left arm, flattening out the small hand. Harper was shaking with fear. She knew that Morris hated children - especially *Predators*. Her greatest joy was imparting pain in children. Before Harper could consider . . .

Harper screamed an unearthly scream as her little finger was violently twisted, snapping the first knuckle. The girl had never felt so much pain and she continued to scream before she struggled to breathe for a moment and then was violently sick, vomiting up everything which she had consumed in the previous twenty-four hours. She fell off the chair, onto the floor, gripping her swollen hand and shaking with the pain.

The next few minutes were totally missed by Harper as she was dumped on her ragged mattress where she passed out from the pain.

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Harper had no idea how long she had been asleep.

She was awoken by that girl who dragged her to her feet and thrust her out of the door. Harper moved as quickly as she could - her hand was throbbing like nothing she had felt before and the pain was difficult to push down. She could taste vomit in her mouth and she remembered the wonderful meal, followed by the pain and the vomiting. It appeared to be daylight Their destination was not Room 14 - it was Room 16, apparently - and rather ominously, there was a camera on a tripod standing to the right of the door. Even more ominously, the man was back, as was Morris.

"Now, Harper, we are going to send your sister a little video - won't that be nice?" the man asked.

Harper rolled her eyes, but she decided to cooperate - at least her sister would know that she was still alive. After she was provided with a set of instructions, the man set the camera running before he stood well out of camera shot. He pointed at the floor and Harper sank to her knees before she stared up at the camera, as directed.

"Is this what you want, dickhead?" Harper called out.

Morris stepped forward and she slapped Harper around the head, hard enough to elicit a scream. Harper returned to her knees having fallen onto her backside. She picked up the newspaper she had been holding and she glared up at the camera.

"Tell them how much fun you are having, Harper," the man directed.

"Fuck you!" Harper yelled back.

"You are not learning, are you, Harper."

Morris stepped forwards, careful to keep her face away from the camera, and she pinned Harper down on the floor while the girl who had tormented her grasped her left hand and held it to the floor. Harper knew what was coming and she felt fear as she screamed out.

"NO!"

Harper continued to scream as she heard the cracking of her knuckles as two more of her fingers on her left hand were broken at the second knuckles. Harper fought to pull her hand away from the iron grip of the girl, but she soon weakened, and she passed out from the incredible pain, for the second time that day.

Later that same day

Harper felt at peace for the first time in many hours, only she had no idea why.

She felt warm and cosy, except for her left hand which felt cold. Then she felt something on her head - a hand - and her eyes flew open. The girl was there, kneeling beside the mattress and she was gently wiping a cloth across Harper's forehead. Harper realised that her hands were not bound, but her left hand was wrapped in icepacks.

"Who the hell are you?"

"I'm Scarlet. Have no fear; I won't hurt you - unless you give me reason to. You are being given the remainder of the day to rest and recuperate before your next chat with the boss."

Harper grimaced and she felt the throbbing in her left hand.

"I am authorised to feed you and treat your injuries. Look, I'm not a fan of what's being done to you, but I am under orders. I will apologise for stripping you, last night, and shoving you in the mud, plus the hose pipe."

"It was bloody freezing!" Harper growled. "You enjoy seeing me naked?"

"Do you want me to hurt you?"

"Sorry."

"Do you need the toilet?"

Harper thought about that for a moment.

"Yes, I do."

Scarlet helped Harper to her feet and out of the cell. They walked a few yards down the corridor and stopped outside a door.

"I'll trust you to use the facilities without causing any trouble and I will be waiting right here."

Harper pushed open the door and she found herself in a small room with little more than a toilet and a sink. Once the door was closed, Harper pulled down her underwear and sat down on the toilet. As well as emptying her bladder and

bowels, Harper took a moment to allow her emotions to get the better of her and she cried for a full minute before there was a banging on the door.

"You done!"

Harper wiped her eyes and a couple of other places before hauling up her underwear, washing her right hand, and her face - not easy with only one hand. Harper pulled open the door to find Scarlet waiting as promised. The girl, who appeared to be around sixteen-years-old with vivid red hair currently up in a ponytail, pointed down the corridor, away from Harper's cell. Under normal circumstance, Harper may have considered taking her down, but with one hand unavailable, that was not a current option. Harper obeyed, and she made her way down the corridor, her feet very cold on the stone flags which made up the floor on which she was walking.

"Any chance of some shoes - some socks maybe?"

"Not a chance."

"Some less humiliating clothing, perhaps?"

"Keep pushing and I hurt you, Harper."

Harper simply shrugged, not wishing to push her luck while she was on the receiving end of non-painful activities. Scarlet escorted Harper to a large room which appeared to be a dining room. On a table, there was a single plate, piled high with a cooked breakfast: bacon, eggs, sausages, fried potatoes, and baked beans. Scarlet pointed Harper at the plate, but Harper hesitated.

"No tricks, this time, we need to keep your strength up. You will be allowed to digest this meal. You'll find some milk and some paracetamol tablets - that hand must really hurt."

"It does," Harper admitted as she sat down at the table.

First things first, she downed two paracetamol caplets and then she took a gulp of the ice-cold milk. She dived into the food with gusto while Scarlet stood a short distance away and watched. The food actually tasted really good and considering she had had very little to eat in the past day, Harper was ravenous.

While she ate, she studied her surroundings and considered her future which at that point, appeared rather bleak.

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True to her word, Scarlet allowed Harper to finish her food and drink the milk.

The cutlery had been plastic, and Scarlet had made a point of ensuring that the knife and fork were accounted for. After another brief visit to the toilet, Scarlet locked Harper back in her cell. However, Harper found a thick blanket and a pillow on her mattress. She smiled for the first time in ages as she laid down on the mattress, pulled up the blanket over herself, and rested her head on the reasonably soft pillow. The young girl was asleep in less than a minute.

Her dreams were not very pleasant as the *Predator* inside her generated scenario after scenario for her mind to feast on as she slept.

That night

They came for her soon after ten o'clock.

Harper had slept for near enough eleven hours although she had screamed out more than once during her rest. Scarlet had checked on her every hour, checking that the girl was behaving - and was still alive. It was basically the same routine as the previous night. Harper was rudely awoken from her sleep and while disorientated, the girl was stripped of her meagre clothing and her hands were secured with steel handcuffs and plastic zip-ties. The girl was then frog-marched down the ice-cold corridor and once again, she was thrown outside into the freezing rain and then into the oozing mud. The shock to Harper's system was acute as she had gone from toasty warm to absolutely freezing in the space of two minutes. Harper screamed as her badly-damaged left hand came in contact with something hard - the paracetamol had worn off hours before.

Harper was struggling, at the end of her tether. She knew that it was all psychological conditioning with the aim of making her more cooperative when it came to her interrogation. She was yanked out of the mud and then blasted with the hosepipe again, only not as well as the previous evening and mud was still present in her hair. She was thrust back into what had to be Room 14 - the heating was on but apart from a towel, she was not given back her clothes as on the previous night. Her welcome was not as cordial either.

"Okay, you bloody little shit," the man almost yelled.

Harper cowered in the corner by the radiator, the towel held tightly around her body by her working right hand. She could smell tobacco - a stench of tobacco which unnerved her. The man was smoking a large cigar, which he placed down in an ashtray. Harper coughed pointedly.

"Second-hand smoke is the least of your worries, young Harper. You have anything to say to me?"

Harper looked away from the man, digging deep for the courage to resist whatever was about to come her way. The man simply shrugged, and he sat down at the table where he ruffled through the same file as the previous day. The man said nothing for several minutes - 'Interrogation 101': humans have a natural will desire to fill gaps in conversation; especially young females. Harper decided that she was in no rush to go anywhere, so she kept her mouth firmly shut and she concentrated on regaining the warmth that she desired so much.

"Sit!"

Harper counted to five before she leisurely stood up and moved over to the chair where she sat down, still glaring at the man.

"How many aboard *Caledonia*?"

"Is it all of *Vengeance*?"

"Who is giving you external assistance?"

"How is the Royal Family involved?"

"Is Princess Mary with you?"

The questions came thick and fast, Harper was given no time to answer any of them - she knew the tactic, but that did not prevent her getting flustered as she tried to keep a black expression and give nothing away.

"WELL!"

Harper was shocked by the sudden yell, almost in her face. She was jolted hard which scared her. The man lit a cigarette but did not smoke it.

"I missed the question."

"How many aboard *Caledonia*?"

"Is it all of *Vengeance*?"

"Who is giving you external assistance?"

"How is the Royal Family involved?"

"Is Princess Mary with you?"

The questions were repeated, only slower.

Harper remained silent, ignoring the verbal barrage. Then the man reached out and he grabbed Harper around the neck, lifting her easily from her chair and planting her on the table top, face up.

"You will answer my questions, you little bitch!"

Harper was caught off guard as she felt a searing pain just above her stomach. She smelt burning and she screamed at the realisation that the man had shoved the burning tip of the cigarette into her skin. The cigarette was there for barely a second before it moved to another spot, and then another - a total of four times, Harper was burned. She screamed, and she screamed as she writhed but the man had her neck in a vice-like grip from which she could not escape. The pain was enormous, and Harper was being pushed very close to her pain threshold which was much higher than that of the average nine-year-old child.

"Hello, Harper," Instructor Morris grinned as she entered the room and the man left.

Harper continued to scream and scream as the door closed behind the man.

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"Grow a bloody backbone, girl!"

Scarlet did her best to hide the look of horror etched into her face at the sounds of the screaming and the smell of burning flesh. She could stomach only so much against a young girl.

"If you are not going to show some form of strength, Scarlet, then you can go back to your mother like the cowardly little girl you obviously are."

"No, Dad - I'll stay."

"For now."

There were times when Scarlet Radford hated her father, but she also loved him more than anything. She was fully aware of his methods and had been for many years. She was sixteen-years-old, and while she could stomach a beating of some poor individual who had upset her father; hurting a child was something else. Her father had explained that Harper was not a normal child, but that was not the point.

Scarlet remained outside the room, ready to return whatever remained of Harper Sharp back to her cell.

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Sebastian Radford walked into the capacious drawing room of his Midlands home.

"Good evening, Sebastian," the man, in his mid-fifties, said as he stood up with a painful grimace.

"Welcome, William - you're looking a lot better."

"The wonders of modern medicine," William Fraser chuckled as he took another sip of whiskey from the cut-crystal tumbler in his hand.

"I have to agree, without modern medicine, I might not be here," the mind-forties woman said as she also took a sip of whiskey.

"Welcome, Susan; it's very good to see you," Sebastian offered. "Let's talk."