

Thursday, October 20th, 2016

Kensington Palace

23:40

Two gunshots rang out in the tight confines of the passageway.

Sergeant Hind was stunned to see Her Royal Highness Princess Mary kneeling with one knee on the floor, her arms outstretched ahead of her with the Glock 19 aimed at where the gunman's forehead had been just moments before his body had slumped to the wooden floor of the passageway oozing blood from his partially destroyed head.

"Clear!" Princess Mary announced as she allowed her training to take over.

CALEDONIA

Despite the very late hour, of the six people remaining aboard, just two were sleeping.

Olivia sat on the sofa on the main deck while her sister slept soundly beside her. Christopher was asleep below in his cabin while Jeremy sat opposite Olivia, tapping away at a tablet. Sarah and Lynn were on the bridge, keeping a lookout while they swung at their single anchor. They were on full EMCON - Emissions Control - and the radar was shut down along with anything else which could radiate an electronic signal to the world. The extensive ESM - Electronic Support Measures - fit on *CALEDONIA* allowed her to scan for electronic emissions for miles around her. Other systems checked for lasers and heat blooms - indications for potential missile launches. They would also rely on the Mark One Eyeball.

It was cold out, but Sarah was happy to walk about on the Sky Deck from where she had an unobstructed view of the horizon all around her. She could see other vessels and the fairy-light-flashing of the buoyage which marked the shallows and the navigable channels. It was tiring though, as there were no other adults to take the watch. However, it would only be another six hours and then dawn would be approaching. The night was breezy, and the vessel rocked with the wind and the waves. The waves would crash lazily against the hull, splashing up and creating a comforting background noise. Lynn came up with some coffee, just as two very dark shapes came alongside *CALEDONIA*. One headed for the bow while the other headed aft. Neither had been seen nor heard by Sarah.

As the two women sipped at their steaming coffee, Sarah felt the hairs on the back of her neck stiffen and she shivered for a moment like somebody had just stepped on her grave.

HMS TRIUMPH

"Officer of the Watch, Sonar."

"Go ahead, Sonar."

"Transients on red zero-four-nine, sir. Sounded like a low-powered screw. Just faded out - heard it for about ten seconds, sir."

"Thank you, sonar."

The Office of the Watch (OOW) strode over to the chart table and he pressed a few buttons which brought up their current position and that of *CALEDONIA*. He

traced a mental line from *TRIUMPH* on a bearing of 049 to port. That was directly towards CALEDONIA.

"Up scope!"

The OOW checked around in a sweeping three-sixty - they were clear. He then settled on red zero-four-nine and he could just make out a single white light designating a vessel, of less than fifty metres in length, lying at anchor. Even with full magnification and the night sensors, he could see little even with eight feet of steel pipe sticking out of the ocean. Needless to say, the officer was a pragmatist and therefore he came to a single conclusion as he reached for the intercom and stabbed the button for the Captain's cabin.

"Captain to the Control Room!"

A little earlier

Kensington Palace

23:25

It was definitely a first for the ten-year-old youngster.

She did not think that she had ever even set foot in a palace, let alone slept in one. For that matter, she had never known anybody really famous - except for Hit Girl, of course - and then she had met Her Royal Highness Princess Mary etcetera, etcetera. Her entire year had been turned upside down. She had started the year as a *Predator*, suffering degrading treatment and worse. Then she had been cast adrift, literally, before being rescued and finding herself in the middle of *Vengeance* and then she had rediscovered her family. A whole heap of adventures later, not least meeting the famous and very beautiful Hit Girl, she had come across a mysterious new vigilante called Belle. More amazingly, she had discovered Belle's true identity and somehow, they had become the best of friends.

So, there she was, sleeping in a Royal Palace alongside a real-life Royal Princess. Naturally, the change of scene had not helped Electra to sleep. She had had a wild day - the start of which had been emotional as she had watched all her friends go off to fight a barely winnable battle - however, she had a job to do and that was to protect her charge. She had not been able to sleep, although Mary had gone out like a light, happy to be back in her own bed and familiar surroundings - even if they were palatial. After an hour, Electra had slipped out of the bed and, still in her pyjamas, she had left the bedroom and gone for a stroll. With a nod at the armed police officer on duty, she had left the Private Quarters and wandered off to examine the corridors filled with ancient portraits of people long dead.

She paused at a window which looked down on the northern gardens. It was a tranquil October night in London. A bit chilly, but Electra was wearing her winter pyjamas which kept her warm and snug. She almost missed it, but as she turned away from the window, her peripheral vision picked up something down in the darkness. Her *Predator*-trained mind told her that what she had glimpsed was wrong. She peered around the window-frame and studied the scene below her. She could see several dark shapes - man shapes that wore black combat gear. She also saw another shape being dragged into the shadows of some trees. Shit! Then, as she began to run back towards the Private Quarters, Electra realised what was going on and who those men were after.

Mary and her father.

CALEDONIA

It was Olivia that sensed something amiss.

For various reasons, Olivia was still a little on edge and prone to sudden reactions to relatively minor events. The glass doors to starboard slid open and Olivia felt the chill from just behind her. Her hand instinctively moved to the object on her left hip. That was the moment Jessica chose to wake up and Olivia saw her eyes open and then focus on something behind her big sister before the eleven-year-old began to shake violently and Olivia felt fear surge through her at the look of sheer panic on her younger sister's face. Jeremy looked up and his own eyes went wide as Olivia was seized from behind and suddenly pandemonium descended on the deck. There was the bang of a pistol as Olivia fired off two rounds from her Glock 26 pistol which she had only been able to pull from the holster on her left hip with her right hand. The enormous man behind Olivia clad in black coveralls and a balaclava fell backwards, dropping Olivia back onto the sofa. Before Jeremy or Jessica could resist, they were seized just as Olivia was slapped across the face by a man approaching from her blind side and she fell to the deck unconscious. Duct tape was slapped across three mouths and their wrists were bound with plastic flex-cuffs. The two conscious youngsters were shoved to the deck hard enough to have Jessica sobbing from the pain, not just from the fear. Their unused weapons were taken away and Jessica looked at her unconscious sister taking in the vicious red mark on the girl's left cheek. The man who Olivia had shot did not last long. He gurgled, and blood splattered up from his mouth. Aerated blood - a lung had been punctured. The two bullets had passed under his ballistic armour.

"He's done for, boss," one of the men said as he checked the fallen attacker.

"Fuck!" the 'boss' growled angrily as he kicked the unconscious Olivia viciously in the thigh.

For the kids, the nightmare was just beginning as they both shook with fright.

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Two decks above, Lynn turned as she heard a noise.

Her brain told her it was at least one muted gunshot. She turned for the gangway below, pulling out her Glock 19 pistol and she was heading back down below when she found somebody racing up the steps and she yelled out a warning as she snapped off two rounds. The invader was shoved backwards by the two close-range bullets, but he shrugged off the strikes and he continued upwards, slapping away Lynn's pistol with his SIG Sauer MPX-K SBR submachine gun. Behind Lynn, Sarah reached for her own Glock 19 pistol, only to have her hand slapped away as another dark shape appeared over the coaming of the sundeck from the bow. Sarah punched the shape but got no further than the man's body armour, so the punch actually hurt Sarah more than her attacker. She was roughly punched in the face and she fell back against the bar. She reached for something to fight with and her hand found a bottle of white wine which she brought around and took across the man's balaclava-clad head. The bottle sent the man reeling and he fell back against the gunwale before giving Sarah a kick to the chest forcing her backwards and down to the deck. She tried again to grab for her pistol but not before a boot struck her in the face and her vision faded to black.

A few feet away, Lynn crashed to the deck after valiantly fighting her own attacker. Blood splashed down her face from her nose and she was very, very angry. She knew that the men were there to kill them all, but she was not going

to go down without a fight, and not with children aboard who were under her care. It had been a few years since Lynn Collins had been fully active in a physical sense, fighting off the bad guys who intended on hurting the United Kingdom and her allies. However, she had forgotten none of her training - and since becoming involved with *Vengeance*, she had been bolstering her skills and regaining the high level of fitness she had always maintained. Jasper, for one, was very pleased with the 'fitter' Lynn! The first attacker was suffering slightly as Lynn struck him with feet, hands . . . any limb which would strike.

But before Lynn could permanently incapacitate her attacker, she was struck on the back of the head by the other man and she tumbled to the deck, her head reeling.

HMS TRIUMPH

"Flashes from Caledonia, sir!"

"Explain," Commander Adams ordered his subordinate.

"At least two flashes, sir - looked like muzzle flashes, I'm certain," the lieutenant replied as he stared through the periscope.

Commander Adams turned to a hovering sailor.

"Find out if Lieutenant Hodges is ready to deploy with his team. Tell him we will expose the forward hatch in ten minutes."

"Aye, aye, sir!" the sailor replied as he vanished forward, towards the torpedo room

Three miles northeast of Princes Risborough

Chequers

Naturally, the security around the Prime Minister's country residence was tight - and it was even tighter when she was actually in residence.

The immediate area was awash with police armed with G36C submachine-guns and dogs armed with razor-sharp fangs. As Crimson moved through the trees from the east, she was very aware of what lay between her and the large 16th-century manor house within which their target was sleeping. However, as she reached the edge of the trees, she noticed something on the ground a few feet ahead. She paused, raising her left fist to advise La Coccinelle there was an issue. Crimson cautiously approached with her SIG Sauer MPX-SD submachine-gun raised and she scanned the area through her NVGs. She was appalled by what she found, and she waved La Coccinelle forward.

"Sacré Dieu!"

"This is Crimson - I've just found a RaSP officer and his dog - both have had their throats almost ripped out."

"*This is Drift - we've got a guy here with his neck snapped - RaSP.*"

"*I think we have another team on the board,*" Akuma commented from the Layup Point.

"Axis?" Crimson asked.

"*You can bet on it,*" Sleuth replied sourly from half-a-mile away, where he and Stripe waited with the vehicles.

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There was no time for congratulations or for comments, so Sergeant Hind moved beyond Mary checking the corridor ahead.

Mary's father went next, smiling at his daughter as he walked past, but with a dark look at the dead man who his daughter had just killed. He knew that he would need to have a talk with Mary at a later point in time as her cold expression concerned him. Ginny nudged Mary on the shoulder and the girl jumped back to her feet and she moved off, keeping the pistol low considering that there were friendlies ahead of her. The group moved down the next corridor and there found an injured police officer - he was unconscious and bleeding, but he was breathing. A little further on, they found another police officer - only he was dead, but with about a dozen empty cartridges scattered on the floor around him but no sign of the enemy.

However, the absence of the enemy did not last for long as they dropped down to the ground floor.

CALEDONIA

Lynn had tried to continue the fight but before she had been able to regain her feet, she had found the cold steel of a suppressor against her right temple - wisely, she reasoned that she was no good to the kids dead.

"You bastards have no idea what you've let yourselves in for!" Lynn exclaimed as she was shoved onto the floor beside the kids - she was already flex-cuffed which prevented her from rubbing her very sore head and she had no idea if she was bleeding.

"Shut up, bitch!" one of the men growled as he slapped duct tape over Lynn's mouth.

Three more men appeared.

"Boat's clear, boss!" one said.

Two more men appeared dragging the unconscious Sarah who was already flex-cuffed, and she was dumped on the floor next to Lynn. Jessica looked over at Lynn with a confused expression, but Lynn gently shook her head. She was thinking the very same thing: where was Christopher?

"They are not all here!" the 'boss' exclaimed.

"They must have gone ashore. We were expecting around twenty; instead, we've found five."

"Once three and eight are finished with the charges, we leave - we can run the numbers up the flagpole then."

"Right, boss."

Chequers

It appeared that their work of infiltrating the complex was mostly done.

It was a simple matter of following the dead bodies and deactivated security features, then things took a turn for the worst as first the heaven's opened and then there was a massive explosion somewhere off to the east.

"This is Prowl - a police Transit just blew up a dozen yards from the main road, blocking the main entrance!"

"Fucking bastards are escalating and cutting off reinforcements. Scourge - keep an eye open," Sleuth directed.

The rain helped things along and the two snatch teams closed on the main building. Victor Alpha made for the staff entrance at the west end of the buildings while Victor Bravo headed directly for the northern side of the building. More bodies were found as they went showing that they were on the right track. It looked very much as though the 'kidnap' was rapidly turning into a rescue mission.

As they closed, gunfire could be heard from within the building indicating that the armed officers were engaging the hostiles.

SCOURGE

A thousand feet above and five miles out, *SCOURGE* with Raptor and Q aboard turned towards the target.

They were *the* air support, now that *TWILIGHT* had been diverted towards London on a rescue mission. That had been very bad timing but there was nothing anybody could do but send help. The light attack helicopter was armed with dual M134D miniguns for the night's operation, allowing plenty of damage to be caused, should that be called upon.

Raptor *really* wanted to give them a try.

TWILIGHT

The helicopter swept over Shepherd's Bush and was just two minutes from Kensington Palace.

Aboard *TWILIGHT*, Scorpion, Chief, and La Terreur prepared for a hot reception when they arrived to rescue their friends. Scorpion wished that she was supporting the attack at Chequers but hers was the only helicopter with back seats. With La Terreur occupying only one of the six seats in the rear, they could carry five more aboard. Scorpion altered course to bring her around into Kensington Gardens from where she would be able to get a good view of the area around the Palace. The helicopter was armed with her usual pair of 12.7-millimetre machine gun pods and triple 70-millimetre rocket tubes mounted under each pod.

Scorpion was itching to get back at the people who had murdered her sister and each bullet would be carefully used.

Kensington Palace

The small group almost collided with one another as they stopped on entering the King's Gallery.

The long gallery with a wooden floor had tall windows running along one side, with large portraits opposite. However, it was not the portraits or the windows

which had caught their attention. In the scattered illumination of the emergency lighting, a small shape had run into the gallery from a doorway on the right towards the far end. The shape wore pink pyjamas and despite that apparent limitation succeeded in disarming a man clad in black combat gear, turning the appropriated suppressed SIG Sauer MPX-K SBR submachine gun around and sending a three-round burst into the man, killing him instantly. The pink-pyjama-clad shape gunned down a second attacker before three more turned on the girl. The girl was fast, and she dodged the strikes at her person. She struck back, hard, using her fists and the butt of the submachine gun in her hands. Mary had never seen her move like that - she never thought it was actually possible for such a slight girl to be a threat to grown men. Then a knife appeared, and blood began to fly as first one and then another carotid artery was exposed to the air resulting in two jets of hot blood which splattered across the wooden floor of the gallery.

"Ewww!" Mary commented.

The final man was shot dead with his own pistol and a bullet through the heart.

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"Where have you been?" Mary scolded as Electra sprinted towards them, the submachine gun held firmly in her hands.

"I couldn't sleep, so I went for a walk."

"How did you get the gun?"

"I cut the straps."

"You had a knife in your pyjamas?"

"Duh . . . I'm a *Predator*!" Electra replied as if that answered everything.

Mary scowled at the disrespectful behaviour. At dinner, Electra had been all prim and proper and very un-Electra. However, Mary mused, she figured that there was a time and a place for Royal pleasantries.

"Your Royal Highness," Electra offered with a nod, "we need to get you to safety."

Mary scowled as the ten-year-old grinned toothily up at the older girl. Mary realised that Electra was mocking her, so she grinned back. Sergeant Hind led his protectee forwards while Electra waved her own protectee forwards.

"After you, Your Royal Highness."

Mary scowled again as she moved forwards.

"With your pistol skills, I'd rather follow on behind," Electra quipped.

"Hey! I killed a guy back there!"

"As I said, with your pistol skills, I'd rather follow on behind," Electra persisted.

"You're such a bitch, Electra . . . sorry, Daddy."

"Come on," Ginny chuckled as she pushed Mary forwards.

Electra just grinned.

Christopher was not happy; the boy had heard sounds as somebody had climbed aboard at the bow.

He had hidden and then he had heard gunshots. Christopher was eleven-years-old and very inquisitive. During his time aboard, the boy had scoured the vessel from stem to stern and keel to radar. He knew almost every inch of the craft. As such, when it came to hide, knew the escape routes, built into the craft to aid escape in an emergency situation. He made good use of those until he had emerged into the boat garage. There he had slunk under the RIB. It appeared that the boat garage had already been searched as nobody came looking for him. A man did pass through into the engine room with a small pack - a pack which he was no longer carrying when he left the engine room.

Christopher had heard some screams, earlier on, but then nothing - the lack of sound worried the boy immensely and he felt very alone. Once the man had reached the deck above, Christopher headed into the engine room. He looked around the pristine, white-painted engine room with its chrome railings as he walked down the steel deck plates. As far as he could tell, there was nothing out of the ordinary that he could see - but then he was neither an engineer nor an explosives specialist. Okay, he reasoned, if he wanted to sink a yacht, where might he plant explosives? Fuel tanks? Engines? Bilges? The engines were water-cooled . . . destroy the water inlet pipe which had to be large for the massive diesel engines and you could sink the vessel very quickly.

He pulled up a small hatch in the deck plates and he peered into the bilges - bingo! But before he could do anything, he was yanked out of the hatch and dumped onto the steel deck plates. He looked up into the balaclavered face of the man who had previously been in the engine room. The eleven-year-old boy tried to be brave, but he was scared stiff. He pulled out his Glock 26 only for the man to laugh as he pointed the business end of his SIG Sauer MPX-K SBR submachine gun at the boy's head. However, before the man could pull his trigger, there was an unholy snapping sound as the man's neck was wrenched around almost 180-degrees. Christopher figured that the guy was probably dead before he hit the deck. An enormous man about six-foot tall and about the same wide smiled down at Christopher.

"You're safe, boy - leave the rest to us."

Kensington Palace

As soon as they were outside, they ran east, towards the Gardens.

The night was very cold, and Electra was shivering in only her pyjamas and slippers. Gunfire erupted out from behind them as they ran away from the Palace. The roar of an approaching helicopter could be heard over to their left and then the downdraft hit them as *TWILIGHT* flew slowly overhead and then pivoted to land on the open grass at the edge of Kensington Gardens. The small group were very happy to see a way out, only they still had about eighty yards to go and there were men determined to prevent them from escaping. As they stopped for a moment before running out into the open, Mary was shocked when Electra suddenly lunged at her as if she was giving the older girl a hug, wrapping her arms around Mary. But then Mary heard a single gunshot and she felt Electra's full weight on her body before she felt a stinging on her left side. Electra fell to the ground and Mary instinctively touched her stinging side - her hand felt wet and it came away red.

Mary's head began to swoon and then all went black as the Princess fainted.

Chequers

Victor Alpha - Crimson and La Coccinelle - found an open doorway and a dead police officer at the east end of the complex where the staff resided.

As soon as they were inside the building, the stench of death and of gunpowder assailed the nostrils of each vigilante. It was the smell of battle. They moved forward, looking out for the enemy and for friendlies alike. The old buildings were a labyrinth of corridors which could easily confuse the unwary. As they moved, they found more death and destruction as previously locked doors showed evidence of small explosive charges being used to 'unlock' the doors. They did find two of the enemy - they were already dead - but they were well-equipped which indicated a professional enemy. Crimson and La Coccinelle moved slowly from room to room checking and clearing each space before moving on. They found themselves getting closer to an obvious gunfight which appeared to be on the next floor above.

However, not all the enemy were in the gunfight. As La Coccinelle checked a doorway into the next room, she heard voices and then two men, armed to the teeth appeared. She promptly shot one in the head with a moment's thought while Crimson took down the other with a well-placed shot to his head. Two more men appeared and the two female vigilantes found themselves embroiled in their own gunfight as both sides shot from cover. Neither could get a decent shot at the enemy who were using a doorway for cover. The thick stone walls, clad in wood panelling easily absorbed the bullets preventing any passing through. While that assisted La Coccinelle and Crimson in their own doorway, it also assisted the enemy. It was a stalemate and both sides were just wasting ammunition. However, the French vigilante could think on her feet. She dug into a pouch on her belt and she pulled out looked like a yo-yo. It was red and about four inches in diameter. Crimson looked on questioningly as her companion pressed two buttons on the device before she whirled the device around her head on a length of string before she released it. Crimson watched the device fly through the air, striking the doorframe above the two enemy gunman and rebounding through before vanishing from sight.

La Coccinelle ducked as there was a large explosion and the incoming gunfire ceased.

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Over on the north side of the building, Victor Bravo - Drift and Nemesis - were engaged in their own firefight with four gunmen who were well-armed and who knew how to use their weapons.

Initially, they were pinned down, but the ever-crafty Nemesis was able to move undercover of Drift's gunfire to a position where she was able to shoot first one and then another gunman in the head, splattering the centuries-old wood panelling with blood, brains, and little bits of bone. The distraction allowed Drift to run forwards and engage the remaining pair of gunmen from a more favourable position. From another part of the house, they heard a loud 'crump' like a hand grenade going off.

It appeared to be a race for the Prime Minister - but would they get there in time?

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She had been rudely awakened from a very deep sleep.

Her protection officer had shaken her none too gently and she had bolted awake.

"We need to move, ma'am - we're under attack."

"Oh, for the love of God," the British Prime Minister complained as she dressed quickly. "Couldn't they have waited until the bloody morning?"

"Would you like me to request that they come back in a few hours?" Sergeant Samuel Heynes, the Prime Minister's personal protection officer deadpanned.

"Could you?"

After dressing, the Prime Minister followed her protection officer out of the suite and down the corridor. They made it about twenty feet before three of the Prime Minister's protective detail stopped the pair. The three men were armed with Heckler and Koch G36C submachine guns and Glock 17 pistols.

"No way down, ma'am - front and back stairs are kill zones. We have no way down at the moment."

"Who are they?" the Prime Minister demanded.

"Unsure at this point, ma'am, only, they are very organised and well-armed."

"Backup?"

"Our communications have been cut, ma'am - no help is coming."

"So, our last stand is here on the landing?"

"Yes, ma'am."

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Her protective detail was dropping by the sounds of the shooting down below.

The previous few weeks had been a nightmare for the head of Her Majesty's Government. She had faced disruption and disharmony across the Government. Three people had voiced unease at what was happening within the country - and they had all suddenly retired for public life. She had not believed a word of their resignation letters - it had been pure tripe. The Government was under siege and it was proving very difficult to understand who could be trusted and who was working for the other side. She was also distinctly unhappy with how the one organisation which could have helped was being hounded to ground. She knew very little about the shadowy organisation run off the books by MI5. She knew that they worked for the government when it appealed to both parties to pool their resources. However, right at that moment, they might have been able to assist with whatever was going on in the country.

Whoever was behind the goings on was escalating in a major way. They were targeting her directly. She was aware that Prince Robert had been targeted but he had escaped unharmed. She was fully aware that he had been voicing deep concerns over what was going on right under the nose of the government but what appeared to be going unseen. Royalty was not supposed to comment directly about the way the government ran the country, only, the Prince was correct - the government was failing to protect the country. Which, by extension, meant that she, the Prime Minister, was failing to protect the country. She had betrayed Vengeance and she had betrayed the country. Unfortunately, as it appeared, she was to pay for that betrayal by dying that very morning. Even as she sat on the floor, surrounded by stone and wood to protect her from stray bullets, she felt anger towards everybody and should she have a chance to strike back, then she would with everything she could muster.

Somebody would pay for attacking her government.

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The Prime Minister was hauled out of her thoughts as the incessant gunfire came closer and closer.

Men were coming up both staircases and her detail was getting ravaged - four men were down and the ammunition for the remainder was running low. Without some form of backup, they would all be dead in the next few minutes. Only, no backup was forthcoming; she knew that. Then there was a loud explosion from the room below which was a surprise - there were no protection officers left down below, so why would the enemy, whoever they were, be setting off explosives? Then everything went bad - very bad - as flashbangs were thrown and the attackers closed on the remaining men of the Prime Minister's protective detail. The Prime Minister herself, she had retreated into her bedroom - a last refuge from the danger. The shooting came closer and closer until it was right outside her door. Despite her outward demeanour, she feared for her life and she was very scared of what was going on right outside her bedroom door. There was a loud bang, followed by a crashing sound, and the door flew open.

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom stood up to face her attacker. The man who strode through the door was alone and he seemed very pleased with what he was doing. The sixty-year-old woman knew that her life was over and that she only had seconds left. Unbidden, she took a few paces back until she found herself against the wall beside her bed. Her slayer took a pace forwards, towards his target and he brought up his pistol which he pointed at the head of the woman before him. The woman straightened up and she glared back at the man.

"Time to die . . ." the man growled with a look of supreme pleasure as he squeezed the trigger.

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"Just what I was going to say," an electronically enhanced voice countered.

The next minute was a complete blur for the Prime Minister as her bedroom suddenly became very busy and very full. A dark-blue shape dove through the doorway and thrust itself in between the woman and the pistol while a dark-grey shape dived for the Prime Minister, grabbing her and pulling her down to the floor. Both hit the ground as the gunman's pistol fired off its round. The bullet cannoned into the dark-blue vigilante just as another form, this one crimson, followed the other and put several bullets into the gunman who fell into an ever-growing pool of his own blood. The man in the dark-blue combat suit stood up and he helped the woman to her feet.

"Are you injured, Prime Minister?"

"No, I am fine, thanks to you," the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom replied. "Drift, am I right?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Thank you for your assistance, young man. You too, Crimson, and I believe Nemesis."

"Not at all, ma'am," Crimson and Nemesis replied in their own electronically enhanced voices.

"La Coccinelle, Madam Prime Minister," La Coccinelle offered. "*Sabre* and *Scimitar* are waiting for us. We must move and get you to safety."

"My protection detail?"

"All dead, but for one injured sergeant, ma'am - Stripe is evacuating him now."

"Oh, my God!" the Prime Minister exclaimed as she was escorted from her bedroom.

The scene was one of carnage with many dead bodies, both Protection Command officers and the unknown gunmen. Speed was of the essence as *SCOURGE* was reporting enemy reinforcements coming from the south. The small group made it outside after a harrowing trip for the Prime Minister past body after body. As promised, the two armoured Range Rover Sentinel 4x4s were waiting.

"Move over, short-round," Drift directed once the Prime Minister was aboard *SCIMITAR* along with Nemesis as Stripe shifted seats.

Behind them, La Coccinelle and Crimson climbed aboard *SABRE* where Sergeant Heynes was being tended to by Sleuth. The two vehicles accelerated away as *SCOURGE* flew overhead before turning to the south.

Kensington Palace

TWILIGHT

Scorpion looked out of her cockpit just as the wheels touched down.

She could see five people approaching. Three were adults and two were youngsters. She could also tell that it was a hot landing zone as she could see the flashes of gunfire from behind the small group. Behind her, La Terreur jumped out armed with a SIG Sauer SPX-P submachine pistol and she sent short bursts past the approaching group. Then Scorpion was shocked to see the two youngsters go down. La Terreur bolted forwards to cover the group as the fallen youngsters were gathered up by the Prince and his bodyguard leaving Ginny to add her own covering fire to that of La Terreur.

Once all were aboard, and La Terreur signalled all was clear, Scorpion hauled the helicopter into the air. She listened to La Terreur explain what was happening in the rear compartment of the helicopter and then she got onto the radio, on a specially encrypted channel.

"Commander, we have injuries - Rigour and Belle. Over."

There was a short pause.

"*Twilight*, Haig. Go for the *Westminster* - she's moored alongside the *Belfast* - they're ready for you. Over."

"Copy that - making for the *Westminster* now. *Twilight* out."