

The Assassin
By
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Sophia rarely moved quickly. She found taking her time and stalking her prey was the best method. Especially when she worked vague jobs like the one she was on at the moment.

Within the Improved circles, Sophia was both a ghost and a legend. Years ago, she had been just another contract killer proficient both in long range sniping and close combat knife play. A friend introduced her to the Improved club in Las Vegas. There she gained the strength of a male body builder and the dexterity of a cat. Her only outwardly inhuman parts were her cat eyes and fangs.

Upon becoming an Improved, Sophia switched alliances and began taking assignments first from her local club. Then later she began accepting jobs from other clubs and finally the ruling council. Though, jobs from that body tended to come rarely and when they did, like the one she worked now, they were usually vague.

On the one hand, Sophia loved those job assignments. They gave her a wide amount of flexibility in the way she achieved her goal. However, sometimes they could make it much harder as well.

Take her current assignment for example. The Miami club had taken it upon itself to try and destroy a growing anti-improved group. At the same time they also wanted to teach a local Transformed Improved club a lesson as well. However, they botched both jobs, allowed some of the anti-improved to escape, and couldn't even harm the Transformed Improved. Even more, those monsters turned around and ate numerous Miami club members. Finally after a while, the Improved realized the anti-improved group had not been destroyed as well.

After that fiasco the council called her. The governing board gave her a simple assignment: track down and kill the head of the anti-improved group. They had no idea who that person was or where they were. Yet, they figured that cutting off the head would cause the group to wither. As far as the Miami Transformed Improved, the council chose to leave them alone.

For most assassins, such a vague assignment might seem impossible. However, Sophia did not blink when she accepted it. She had done others like it and knew where to start.

Like most hidden groups she hunted, the assassin would follow the money. At first Sophia carefully studied their attacks. In the beginning the anti-improved group acted like amateurs. Yet over time they became organized along the lines of a special operations group.

She uncovered that the anti-improved group had developed a good information network. On top of that, they seemed to have a fast action squad which could be anywhere in a short time. When they attacked the group hit hard and quick. About the only blemish on their record was the Miami hit.

The Miami incident taught Sophia that her target could be deceived. However she astutely recognized that they would become a lot more cautious afterword. She knew tricking them a second time might not work.

However, that did not mean she was out of options. Sophia first flew down to Miami and met a few contacts. After spending some money and threatening a few lives, the assassin learned that the group had dropped millions during that fiasco. All of it was in untraceable cash.

While following the money was not easy, the amount used during the Miami fiasco itself told her something. It informed her that they had a lot of available capital. That they must have had a backer with more than enough money to throw it around where needed.

Something Sophia also learned was that her contacts mentioned that they seemed to be mostly from the west coast. That gave her a good idea of where to start. Before long, after mapping a few other attacks, Sophia had isolated the group down to California.

Once there, she asked herself which billionaire was backing a paramilitary group. Plus, they had to have an axe to grind against the Improved. Someone who was willing to go out of their way to destroy them.

Finally, after a month, Sophia hit pay dirt. It involved the Los Angeles Improved club. A bunch of years ago the club was being run by a fool by the name of Drake Andrews. Unlike the other clubs, Drake liked to take a more forceful approach to recruiting new Improved. If he could not persuade someone to

join, he liked to kidnap and brain wash them. The man appeared to get off using torture and bondage to get his way.

One day out of nowhere Drake's club was attacked and destroyed by two rogue monsters. Who they were, where they had come from, and who had created them, no one knew. Yet, what Sophia discovered was that right before they attacked, Drake had been planning on transforming a woman by the name of Ava Andrews. However, from what Sophia learned, the woman was unwilling. Thus, Drake was planning on forcing her to become an Improved so she could spend her money on his club.

The monsters attacked while they were transforming Ava. What became of her afterward was anyone's guess as the woman never appeared in public again. Yet, her companies never announced her death and instead simply stated that Ava had become reclusive. On top of that, based on the anti-improved attacks after the incident, it was not long before that group started becoming better equipped and more organized.

Sophia assumed that after the incident, Ava became the reclusive head of the anti-improved group. That her transformation had gone wrong while her mind had not been modified. Because of that, the assassin guessed she had an axe to grind against the Improved.

Yet the issue was where did Ava live now? If the Sophia's hunch about being monstrously disfigured was right, then she could not move around easily. Thus, she had to be located in an out of the way spot.

Another facet she learned of that anti-improved group was that there had been reports of them working with a few monsters. One seemed to have a giant cat like body while the other had a monstrous ape body. From the few interactions with the Transformed Improved, Sophia knew big monsters needed a lot of meat to stay alive. Like the Transformed Improved, those monsters had to keep their food supplies secret lest the public find out.

So Sophia reasoned she had to track down, in California, a place that regularly bought large amounts of meat. Yet one that was not a food company. Nonetheless, the assassin recognized that was a supremely daunting task.

Another month later, Sophia learned of a spot near San Jose which seemed to fit. She discovered it was owned by a shell company which led to one of Ava's companies. The area was well

off the beaten path and rarely saw any visitors. However as she discovered, cattle was delivered there on a regular basis.

Because of her cautious nature, Sophia was camped out above Ava's compound. Far off in the distance was the bustling route 101. Before her was the compound nestled against the mountains.

At first the place looked like any isolated industrial complex. When she arrived by midnight she found the spot contained a few white metal buildings and a small office tower. With numerous blaring lights lighting up the grounds, Sophia saw how deserted the place looked. The only things she witnessed moving about in the dark were a few random security trucks.

She then peered intently for more signs beyond the obvious. Soon she discovered numerous video cameras posted on buildings, poles, and a few semi hidden spots. Beyond that, she could not see anything else. To her, it seemed as if a part of the complex's security was its remoteness.

At daybreak, off to the side of the property, Sophia saw a large cattle pen. It was filled with a small herd of long horn cattle. Also hidden from the highway, but within her view, was a training complex that included an obstacle course. It reminded her of the various special forces camps she visited in the past. Before long, Sophia witnessed a small group of people rush over to the training area. While behind them, their instructor seemed yelled like a drill instructor.

Then she witnessed something that confirmed a few other things she heard. Coming out of an industrial building was one of the monsters that attacked the Los Angeles club. It looked like a giant cross between a cat and lizard. Its main head had a mostly dinosaur appearance with six eyes. Plus the thing's paws seemed more like hands than animals. Even more was that jutting out of the main body, by its shoulders, was a nude female torso that had two heads, horns, and four arms.

The thing stretched her limbs waking up. Afterward she plodded over to the obstacle course to watch the trainees going about their morning exercises. Then she worked her way over to the cattle pen and started chasing after the cattle. To Sophia, it looked like the monster was having fun chasing the bovines instead of straight killing them.

Meanwhile, coming out of a separate building was the other monster Sophia had heard about. It sort of looked like a gigantic gorilla with not two but four big arms, a long scorpion

tail, and a man's torso emerging out where its head would be. When the being turned to peer about, she saw a maw in his gorilla chest.

At first, Sophia expected the gorilla monster to go about waking up like the other. Yet it briefly went inside and came back out pulling a heavy cart full of logs. He casually tugged the thing across the ground towards the area where the trainees were. When the instructor saw the monster, he came over and thanked the thing telling him where to put the cart. Afterword, the trainees rushed over and together they picked up the logs. Then the groups began to work out in Navy Seal fashion. The monster moved off to the side and heavily sat down to watch and do a few exercises himself.

While the trainees went about their training, Sophia peered back to watch the buildings. Despite appearing as a manufacturing plant, the place operated more like a military base. She saw other people going about their own exercises. While others seemed to be pulling out and servicing numerous vehicles, many of which were for combat.

She next peered closer at the four story office building. Pondering it for a moment, Sophia saw numerous people coming and going from the building. Some were military while others seemed like office workers. Then out of the back came two more monsters. Yet, unlike the behemoths which she saw earlier, these two were human sized.

One seemed like the other monster's secretary. This female appeared to be some sort of bee woman. Jutting out of her rear end was a giant bee abdomen with a stinger while she had four segmented insect limbs under her human arms. Mandibles emerged from her jaw while above them she had six human eyes in two rows of three and a pair of antennae. Plus, Sophia witnessed that her skin was nearly black with numerous chitin plates. This bee woman seemed to be listening while writing things in a notepad held in her human arms.

When Sophia peered at the other monster, she quickly recognized her as Ava. The woman's upper half appeared to be just like her photos with little to no changes. Yet, her lower self was completely different. Instead of having legs, Ava's lower end was a gigantic snake. It had blue green scales with brown stripes. Even more was that she had a large fanged maw in her belly while the end of her tail had a sharp spiked stinger.

The pair appeared to be casually taking in the morning sunshine while Ava dictated something to the bee woman. The course she seemed to be slithering headed towards the training area. Neither seemed even remotely worried over being targeted by a sniper.

Seeing her target, Sophia pondered her options. She could pull out her sniper rifle and take a shot at her right then. Yet, she was not sure what other changes Ava had that could not be seen. The assassin knew a few Transformed Improved who were big and strong enough that a sniper bullet would not kill them. Some even had their main brain not located in their remaining human heads. However, the other option was to get up close and personal with Ava. That way she could easily defeat the monster's defenses and make sure she was dead.

Sophia chose to disregard the sniper option and instead go for sneaking in and killing Ava by hand. That way she could make sure the job was done right. Thus there would be no need to come back.

The rest of the day found Sophia continually watching the compound. She saw the bee woman go back into the office building. Around that time, the cat monster was led into a tractor trailer which had been disguised as one of Ava's holding companies. Once she was safely inside, black garbed soldiers hopped into a few SUV's and escorted the big rig away from the compound. Meanwhile, the gorilla monster tried to keep himself busy doing odd jobs around the place. Finally, Ava went to various buildings checking on things. Then she headed back to the office tower and did not come out. By nightfall, the compound became quiet with only security moving about.

On the one hand, Sophia wanted to first look up the office building's plans. That way she could carefully plan her way in. In the past she would have done that and scouted inside before finishing her job. Yet, with the amount of work and obscurity surrounding the site, Sophia realized conducting her usual amount of pre-work would be impossible. Ava's company had done a good job hiding it. On top of that, it could take Sophia nearly a year to figure out exactly what was inside. Time the Improved council would not be willing to give her.

Due to that, Sophia decided to take her chances and go inside without any prep work. On the one hand, she was not tremendously pleased over doing that. She knew her chances of

successfully getting in and out unnoticed would significantly decrease. Yet, she realized she did not have much choice considering the amount of time she took just to find the place.

After a short bit, Sophia had timed out the roving security. Plus, she had tried to find any video blind spots. However, she recognized that the place's roving security was good as they never moved in set patterns. Along with that, whoever laid out the surveillance cameras did a good job placing them.

Within thirty minutes, Sophia discretely approached the office complex. She ducked behind a few parked vehicles waiting for the roving security to pass. Next she circled around the building. She saw that most entrances had at least two guards beside them. However, she did find a back loading ramp which seemed to have the least amount of security with just one man due to the locked doors behind him.

Sophia pulled out a knife and slowly crept alongside the building. Then when the guard had his back to her, she slashed his throat. Quietly she pulled the corpse out of sight and turned to face the locked door. There she used lock-picks on the lock until she heard it click open.

Once past the door, Sophia found herself within a simple storeroom. Briefly she spotted a camera, but recognized its blind spot. Ducking out of the thing's view, she worked her way through the room and towards a back stairwell.

Experience told her the well should be covered by cameras. How many and where, she was not sure. Yet, it was the most immediate way to get upstairs.

Thus, opening the stairwell door, she peered inside the cinderblock space and saw nothing but metal stairs. Going inside, she did find one camera. However, its angle meant if she tucked up against a wall, she could slowly move by without notice.

Twenty minutes later and three more cameras found Sophia up on the top level. Before her was a metal exit door with a card reader beside it. Reaching into her pocket, Sophia pulled out a device that was called a gecko. It had a plastic card with a chip embedded in it. A couple wires ran from the plastic thing into a small black box with a few lights.

The assassin inserted the card into the reader. Then she pressed a button on the black box causing a red light to appear.

There she waited while the device hacked the lock. Finally the box showed a green light while the door unlocked with a metallic click.

Hurriedly stowing the thing, Sophia carefully entered a posh looking office space. The floor had been done in light wood decking, the walls were a soft sandy color, while the ceiling was even more wood. Hanging off the walls were numerous paintings and photos. Many of the latter were of either Ava or a man standing beside race cars.

Softly she began to creep along the hallway. Sophia had a good idea this had to be where Ava lived. Yet, not seeing the layout meant she had no idea where the woman was. Nor did she know if there was anyone patrolling the level.

Abruptly as she crept along the hallway, something hit the building rocking it like an earthquake. Sophia registered that it sounded as if someone had fired a rocket at the building. Suddenly realizing things were exceedingly bad, Sophia first wondered if she could use the confusion to go after Ava? Yet, that idea was dashed when she heard people rushing into the level. Along with that, another rocket slammed into the building.

Sophia had just enough time to duck out of the way of a group of security streaming towards Ava. The assassin ducked into an office and peered out a window to see what looked like a small platoon assaulting the building. The attacking vehicle appeared to be an off-road SUV with a rocket launcher attached to its roof.

Within seconds the weapon fired off another projectile. It zoomed through the air blasting the building near Sophia. It was close enough to rupture the glass she stood behind and crack the concrete. The assassin tumbled out of the building. Slamming into the earth, Sophia's body was badly mangled.

"Who's this," questioned someone hurrying up to see who she was in the middle of the raging battle.

"Not sure, but she's still alive."

"Is she one of those idiot anti-improved people?"

"Don't know, but let's take her and see what she knows."

Another person yelled for a stretcher over a radio. Within moments Sophia passed out from the pain.

An hour later, Sophia briefly regained consciousness to the sounds of a vehicle she was in. "Damn, those slippery bastards got away," swore a woman.

"I know! She was supposed to be there. God damn we missed her!" Exclaimed a man up near the front of the vehicle.

"I told Jeff, don't go in hard and heavy. Do some leg work and find out if she really was there."

"And you thought Jeff would do that. The man likes his explosives. He's always going to side with blasting things every time."

"True."

"Who's she?"

A woman leaned in to peer at Sophia's battered face. The assassin could not say anything due to the injuries to her mouth. Plus, her vision was rather blurry and did not allow her to see the woman clearly.

"Not sure, but she's an Improved."

"Oh really?"

"Yep."

"So they had Improved as well?"

"I doubt it. Our intel mentioned they had a few monsters. No pure Improved."

"So who's she?"

"Not sure, but I thought I heard a rumor a while back that the Improved Council was sending an assassin after the head of this group? I think that's why Jack sent us in. He wanted to take her out before the assassin did."

"That crafty monster. You think she's?"

"Could be. But we'll let Jack work on her. He'll find out the answers in a short bit. He's been a bit restless lately. Having her as a project might improve his mood a bit." At that moment, someone leaned in and stuck something into Sophia's shoulder. After a couple moments she blacked out.

Sophia regained consciousness sometime later. Her ears registered that she was in some sort of large space. In the background she could hear things echoing. Plus, there were large fans running. Then when she opened her eyes, she quickly shut them against a bright light blaring down upon her. Cracking them open again revealed that a medical light was above her. Beyond that all she saw was a large dark empty space.

"Where am I," croaked Sophia, her throat felt dry and

scratchy. She found herself heavily strapped down to a hard metal table.

"You're in my lab my dear," answered a male voice. It had a monstrous quality to it.

"Oh no," gasped Sophia recognizing the situation she was in. She had been near more than enough Transformed Improved to recognize their voices. "What happened and why am I here?"

"That remains to be seen. However, answer my questions and I might let you live. Don't answer, and, well, you'll become my snack." The unseen man's speech had a hissing quality to every S syllable.

"Why would I want to answer your questions freak?"

"Because right now you're facing an excruciating death or a semi-comfortable life. It all depends on you and your answers."

Sophia briefly pondered her situation. "Who are you?"

"Normally in these situations, I'm the one who asks the questions. But, I'll answer this one question for you. I simply go by Jack. I used to have a much fuller name, yet, I chose to discard that when I transformed. Jack is all you need to know. Now, let's start off with an easy question. What's your name," asked the still unseen monster.

"Fuck you, you monster!"

"Oh really?" Before she knew it, something bit down on her foot but not taking it off. Sophia let out a loud scream. "You are quite tasty you know. Now, I'll ask again, what's your name?"

"Sophia! But no one knows me by that."

"Then what are you known as?"

"The Hunter."

"The Hunter huh? Hmmm... where have I heard that nick name before? It's been many years since I was a part of the Improved. Oh yes, you're the council's lap dog!"

"I was not a lap dog!"

"Yet, you did their bidding?"

"Yes I took jobs from them."

"Then you're their lap dog. Now, why were you in that building," patiently asked Jack. He still had not moved into her eyesight.

"I was just taking in the scenery!"

"Liar! Next time I will truly eat you!"

"Ok ok, I was sent there to kill the head of the anti-Improved group."

"Were you successful?"

"No, someone attacked the building before I could."

"Oh, they were my people. Though, I gotta say they did get a little overzealous with their assignment. From what I'm to understand, their prey escaped."

"You mean Ava survived?"

"My spies told me so. But don't worry the person that ran that fiasco has been dealt with. In the end he was quite tasty. Now, about you. Did you have any other assignment?"

"No, just to deal with the woman named Ava Andrews."

"Is she?"

"Yes, she's the one bankrolling the anti-Improved group."

"That's good to know. Now about you? What were you going to do after the job was done? Move on?"

"Yes."

"Ah, so again you had no secondary assignment?"

"No."

"Well then, it seems our paths crossed at the wrong moment. Funny how the Improved Council and the Transformed Improved were working at the same thing. Too bad we didn't coordinate. Would have made things end up much better. Yet, what's done is done. Now that leaves me with what to do with you?"

Out of Sophia's eyesight, she heard something heavy sliding across the floor. Then out of nowhere, a monstrous looking human sized torso appeared to her right. The man's unclothed body looked like a cross between a human and snake. His snake head had a large flared hood with typical cobra markings. The monster's strong chest and arms were covered by black and yellow striped scales. When he leaned against the table, she saw his hands were tipped by thick black sharp claws.

"I could eat you," contemplated the snake man.

"You do look so tasty," spoke another nude cobra man that approached from her left.

"Yet, I don't think that would serve my purposes," added a third torso that appeared in-between the two.

Then with another sliding sound, while laying on the table, Sophia suddenly comprehended that those three were not actually separate. Instead, each was connected to what looked like a

giant snake by long flexible necks. The monster was a huge three headed cobra snake.

"No, I won't eat you. I can use someone of your talents," contemplated one of Jack's torso's. "Especially with some of the people I've got now! But the question is, should I just heal you back to your previous state or improve you even more than before."

That last pronouncement caused a creeping fear to overcome the otherwise steady woman. She did not want to become a monster like Jack. In her mind she would rather be eaten then become something like him.

"No, please no," Sophia whimpered.

"You don't want to become a monster?" Softly asked a torso leaning in to study her. His flickering tongue lapped out and lightly grazed her cheek.

"No, no..."

"It's pretty fun you know?"

"Just kill me and get it over with!"

Jack leaned his torso back up. "Nah, I have use of your talents. Trust me, after I'm done, you'll enjoy being a monster working for me. Everyone eventually does!"

Before she could plead with him more, Jack turned his massive main body around and slowly slithered away. From where she lay, Sophia could not see where he went. Yet despite that, she could hear him lightly chuckling. Along with that, he seemed to be talking to himself. However, whatever he was saying was too soft for her to make out.

Then with a heavy sliding slither, Jack came back and leaned a torso in. In his human sized clawed hands was a syringe full of nanobots. Sophia recognized it from when she had last been enhanced. Seeing that caused her to scream.

"Oh, don't worry. I think you'll like what I have in store for you. But don't be concerned. I know how you Improved like to retain your human appearance. I won't try to ruin it that much. At least nothing that you can't hide." Jack assured her with a soft snicker from a few of his heads. Before she knew it, he stabbed her with the syringe injecting the nanobots. Like the first time she underwent an enhancement, she began to feel a fiery pain lance throughout her body.

Afterward, Jack slithered back to his main frame computer and watched the screen. Once he saw the nanobots report they

were ready, he pressed the start button. "Here goes, I think you'll like what I chose." He turned around to watch.

Yet Sophia did not have enough time to say anything. Within minutes the pain she felt before erupted in even greater agony. She let out a loud agonizing howl of pain.

Within it all, Sophia began to feel all sorts of strange feelings throughout her body. Within the palms of her hands, all sorts of hard objects started forming. Then from those things grew something that went from her palms, up through her arms, and into her chest. While she could not see what was forming, Sophia did notice within moments she could move something strange in each of her palms. Yet, between the pain and her being strapped down, she had no idea what they were. Then on top of all that, a strange prickly sensation erupted all over the skin of her arms.

Next, along her spine and rear end, Sophia registered something growing in back there. While she was not sure what they were, they felt like two objects within their own pouch like pockets deep within her body. That if she was not laying upon the hard table, she would have pushed them out.

Then whatever the nanobots were doing to her went for her head. Within her mouth she felt her tongue divide in two. Upon finishing its division, her two tongues lengthened and their ends split apart. When she pushed them out of her mouth, Sophia suddenly realized she now had two snake tongues! Both of which flooded her with all sorts of new tastes which her brain recognized as smells in the air. Plus, her upper canines became hollow and more fang like.

On top of that, her vision became blurry for a moment. When it came back, she could see even more clearly than what her cat eyes could show. Along with that, two sudden pressure spots began to form within her forehead. Then within moments the skin over those spots ripped open exposing two more eyes. Suddenly her acute vision became even deeper.

Finally, two dimples developed above her newly grown eyes. They were the size of peas and were barely noticeable. Yet, once they finished coming in, along with her acute vision, Sophia suddenly found she also could see in infrared.

After that last bit grew in, her changes suddenly slowed down and stopped. Sophia just lay there drawing in ragged breaths. With the growth of two snake tongues in her mouth,

there was little chance she could say anything that did not come out very garbled.

"With that exception of that second tongue and eyes, I'd say you came out as I wanted. But, I know if I let you go now, you'd just run away." Jack appraised her. "So let's alter your mind a bit."

After that Sophia felt the fiery pain erupt in her head. For a moment it felt as if her mind was being scrambled. When the changes began to subside, she felt her mind clear.

However, Sophia realized she had no enmity to Jack nor the Transformed Improved. If anything, she realized she actually liked what he had done to her. That becoming a bit more of a monster was just fine. Plus, she realized she was grateful to him for changing her.

At first she wished she could express her happiness to him. Yet her two tongues made that nearly impossible. At best she just blathered something incomprehensible.

"Don't worry, I understand," soothed Jack as he slithered over. "Let me undue your bindings so you can appraise your new additions." With that, Jack used his numerous torsos to unbind her.

After that, Sophia sat up. On the one hand, she noticed her arms felt and acted almost normal. Yet, the first thing she become aware of was that both limbs were covered by sandy brown snake scales with soft black speckles along their tops. When she flipped her arms over, she recognized the scales were more like a snake's underbelly. Even more, there seemed to be a sort of pouch like tube that ran just underneath her skin. Following these tubes led her straight to her hands. On the one hand, her fingers now ended in sharp black claws. Yet, those were not what had truly caught her attention. Instead, she found what looked like snake maws embedded in her palms. Opening them up, she realized the roof of those mouths were the undersides of her hands. Each jaw moved down outwards from her palms. Within them they had a set of hollow snake fangs and a long forked tongue. Like the two in her mouth, she could taste the air with those tongues. Plus, Sophia realized those maws had their own throats she could swallow with.

Carefully pushing herself off the table with her new hands, Sophia readjusted the torn pants she wore to expose her rear end. Then she pushed out two tentacle like three foot tails.

Each semi looked like snakes with human flesh. Their tips ended in sharp bone spikes that she could be withdrawn into their own sheaths. Plus she could move them about quite dexterously.

"I've spliced the eastern brown snake into you. Thus all of your fangs can inject some of the most deadly toxin known to man. More than enough to kill an Improved. Now you're the perfect hunter." Jack appraised her with a pleased tone.

Sophia wanted to call him her master as that felt like the right thing to do yet all she could muster was a head nod. She even felt a thrill knowing she was going to hunt the Improved. Then she remembered her original assignment to kill Ava. Sophia wanted to ask him about that but only mangled it.

He somehow understood her anyway. "Don't worry about that puny anti-improved group. I was just wanting to hurt them to keep them weak. Yet, you and I have many other important things to do. Many people who should be killed. Many Improved who have tried to harm us Transformed Improved. That's where you come in!" Jack smiled with multiple smiles. He led her back to his computer so he could fill her in with what he wanted her to do. Sophia eagerly listened knowing his plans would allow her to try out her new changes!