

CHAPTER 1

Sheila

Sheila MacDonald was found in what was euphemistically called a new city in Scotland. Glasgow—and in particular, an area called the Gorbals—was at one time notorious as the worst slum in Europe. It was famous for its gang fights with the favorite weapons being open razors and bicycle chains. A new city was built many miles outside Glasgow, and the slum population, most of whom were on welfare anyway, were moved out of the inner city into their new residence. Little in the way of public transit was made available for the inhabitants of this new city to visit Glasgow, which was reasonable as very few of these people were employed in any case. The results were of course predictable, but no one cared; out of sight, out of mind. A similar tactic of shifting the problem populations to an isolated suburb was adopted in several other cities in Scotland.

Sheila, like all the children who joined the Munro Foundation, came to the attention of a teacher through her extraordinary mathematical ability at an early age. The teacher was vaguely aware of the Munro Foundation and its search for children with just this ability and the possibility of remuneration for the finder. He sought more information and applied in her name, and a psychologist showed up. IQ and personality testing showed that the child fulfilled the criteria they were looking for—specifically, a hard-driving genius, low in empathy, high in conscientiousness, and with an astounding IQ of 175.

Manon, one of the founders of the Munro Foundation based in Luxembourg, had by now established an extensive economic empire across

Europe. One of her people, a young woman who now oversaw one of her businesses in England came up to Scotland to interview the parent, as the girl lived with her father, her mother long since having disappeared. The girl was nine years old. As it was late morning, the father, who was an unemployed alcoholic, was still sober. He actually was very clever himself and had insight into his own wasted life. All he saw most days was the bottom of a bottle and an early death, which, like many alcoholics, he was resigned to and quite welcomed.

He was hungover and remorseful. He had no illusions and knew in his heart that if his child stayed with him, she would end up as a single mother, working a dead-end job, if she worked at all, and that her child would be the same, an endless cycle of hopelessness and despair.

When the Foundation program of a residential scholarship was explained to him, he realized immediately that this was a chance for his daughter to break out, to be something he never was and never would be. This was the one and only chance she would ever get. He signed the papers, hastily packed her few things, and saw her to the door with the young woman. He knelt and embraced his daughter. There were tears in his eyes, his voice hoarse with emotion.

“Dinna come back, Sheila. There is nothing for ye here, no hope and no future. Work hard at your lessons now, lass, and make me proud o’ ye.”

He saw his child enter the limo and remained watching until the vehicle disappeared. He went back into his house and closed the door behind her with an empty sense of relief. He felt he had done one good thing in his life. In a fashion eerily similar to Takes Away Clouds Woman’s father in Alaska, he drank very heavily that night and fell asleep, wishing that he would not wake in the morning like so many alcoholics. He got his wish. The body was not discovered for several days. No one knew where she had gone, so it was several weeks later before Sheila found out that her father was dead. She mourned for him, for his bright talent, for what might have been, for his goodness when he was sober, and for his tearful regrets. She was forever grateful to him for forcing her to leave and telling her not to come back.

When Sheila joined the Prometheus Group, they were still based in Luxembourg. She was one of these extraordinarily pale-skinned, green-eyed redheads who needed a little cosmetic dentistry only. The other genius children already there were far ahead of her. Once she caught up, which with tutors she did rapidly, she came to love the fierce academic

competition among the children and the grind of the study program. She also found the vigorous physical training that everyone undertook strange at first but then accepted as fact of life. They were also encouraged in some form of the arts, such as dance and music, if they wished. When the group went to Arizona, she learned to ride and shoot, like the other hothouse plants.

Neil Munro, another Scot and a former boxer and Luxembourg politician, was, among other duties, the nominal leader of the Foundation academy and oversaw the education of these children. To compete for Munro's attention, which Sheila craved, she taught herself a little Gaelic, the old language of Scotland, of which Munro himself knew barely anything. She spoke to him in Gaelic, and he did learn a few words just to please the earnest little girl, although she kept chiding him that he knew more Irish than Scottish Gaelic.

She learned the Scottish dancing, especially the sword dance, where they dance over the crossed swords, and she always pushed him to dance with her. Munro had learned to do so on the recommendation of his American publicity agent when he was a professional fighter. The big man and the little redhead dancing side by side drew some smiles, but both took it seriously. When the policewomen from Japan began to come for further training at the ranch in Arizona with a view to become Praetorian Guards, they also liked it. Some learned the dance, as did Tomiko, the famous Japanese Olympic pistol shooter and head of the Praetorian Guard organization, who were closely allied to the Munro Foundation.

Sheila raced through the education program, and by seventeen, she had a double degree in engineering, which Munro saw as a basic degree for everyone, no matter what they decided to do subsequently, and accounting, as she had no interest in pure science. At fifteen, she had spent some time working with Manon, who had remained behind in Luxembourg, overseeing her ever-expanding business conglomerate when the rest of the group moved to the US. Sheila adored that elegant, hard, cynical woman.

Sheila enjoyed that experience so much that after she came back to America, as soon as she graduated and could decide her own future—as could all the children in the program—she returned to Europe to work for Manon. In preparation for her departure, she relearned French and some German, and of course, living in Arizona, she knew Spanish; and from contact with the visiting Japanese, she had a working knowledge of that language. Very quickly, her genius enabled her to become one of

Manon's senior analysts. Manon, ever conscious that looks can smooth the way, encouraged cosmetic surgery with a minor nip and tuck here and there. When Sheila initially looked askance at that suggestion, Manon pointed out that she spent money on her hair, so why not on other physical attributes?

As her empire continued to expand, Manon sought to vertically integrate companies so that they could function semiautonomously internationally and automated as much as possible, as she saw automation and robotics as the future. She wanted to build factories to build machines to build machines, as she put it.

The man sent originally from Japan to protect Munro's first wife, Kodama, had for years served as Manon's enforcer, providing necessary muscle when it was required. When Kodama went back to Japan, he had remained behind to protect her children and subsequently the Foundation children. They called him the Ninja although he kept pointing out he was not that. Since the ninja had gone to Arizona with the children he protected, and to whom he taught martial arts, Manon did not have a regular enforcer. He would return only if necessary. All the Praetorian Japanese shooters knew the ninja. He spent time training them and therefore got to know them reasonably well.

He found that a couple of the young Japanese shooters particularly relished the thrill of the hunt. Realizing that they seemed a little different, he had them sent north to Alaska where, with Running Bear—the head of an Athabaskan Indian tribe who was also associated with the Prometheus Group—they could hunt deer and moose. As they liked that experience and wanted more, he obliquely broached with them the topic of the ultimate hunt: eliminating really bad people.

These two young women were intrigued, so he quietly had them take a course of defensive driving and, at the gun range, taught them to use more lethal weapons than the pistols most of the Praetorians used. He then took them on one of his corrections. This was a particularly awful group who had come to Western Europe after the Berlin Wall came down. Having operated in the Soviet East, there was nothing so evil that they would not do. This group was threatening one of Manon's enterprises.

After careful planning and surveillance, one night, the three attacked the house in France where the gang were headquartered. One girl drove. The other, leaning out of the car door with an assault rifle, hosed down the guards stationed out front and then the windows of the house, while

the ninja, leaning out of the moon roof of the limo, put several shoulder-mounted missiles into the house. The chief and the majority of the gang leaders died in the conflagration.

They drove quietly off. The three independently made their escape from Europe without incident. As the female Praetorians acted as unassuming Asian tourists, they drew little attention. Thereafter, when necessary, the ninja used one or the other as his helper. Eventually for a time, they became independent enforcers for Manon's organization. Sometimes one or the other would do what was necessary, but they preferred to work as a team. They made it clear that this was short term only, and they did not plan on doing it for long.

Manon did not want Tomiko, who was one of the nominal leaders of the Praetorians, to be compromised and therefore kept her out of this particular loop. Tomiko probably knew or suspected, as little got by her, but "don't ask, don't tell" seemed the best approach. Occasionally, one of the other Japanese women Praetorians would hint that they, too, wanted to take part, almost like an initiation or a secret rite of passage, especially for the younger ones. Such activities remained very secret.

Sheila, when much younger, had brought up the question of the use of force at one of the evening sessions that Munro held with the children. She had been told by someone or had read somewhere that force solved nothing. This seemed to her one of these idealistic and foolish statements. When she mentioned it to Munro, he laughed and quoted Cicero, "There is nothing so absurd that some philosopher has not said it." Turning serious, he quoted Hobbes, "Covenants without the sword are but words,' and there is an old poem,

‘That presently word would come,
That a tribe had been wiped off its icefield,
Or the lights had gone out in Rome.’”

She realized immediately from that quotation that all things in life could not be solved by goodwill, and sometimes naked force, or the threat of naked force, was required. Understanding and believing that, Sheila, who shot at the range with the other children and had trained for years in self-defense with the ninja, did some hunting in Alaska. She wanted to become comfortable with the idea of weapons, as it was becoming obvious that anyone who wished to live in Europe would need to protect